

**NEW**

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PLANNING THE PERFECT CITY ESCAPE

# 101 WORLD'S GREATEST CITIES

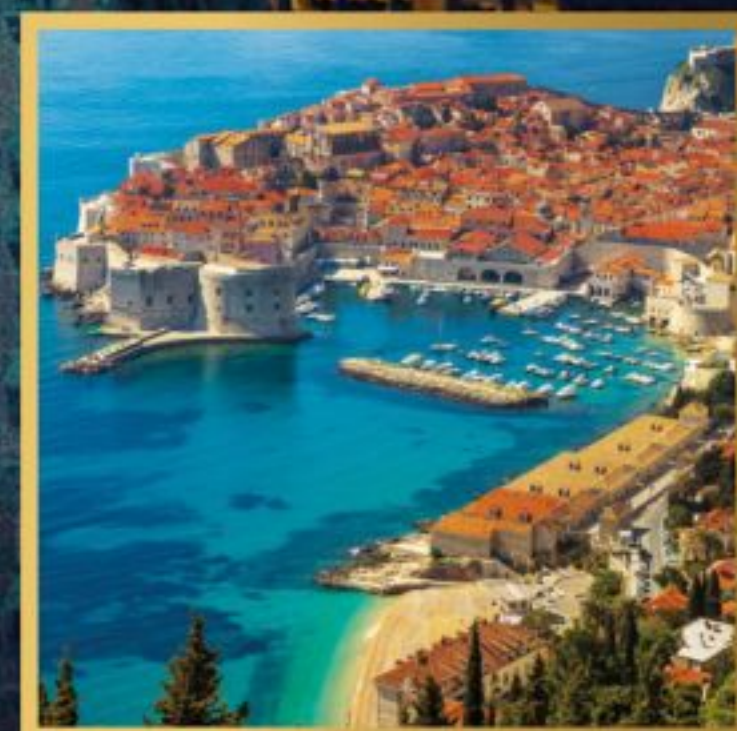
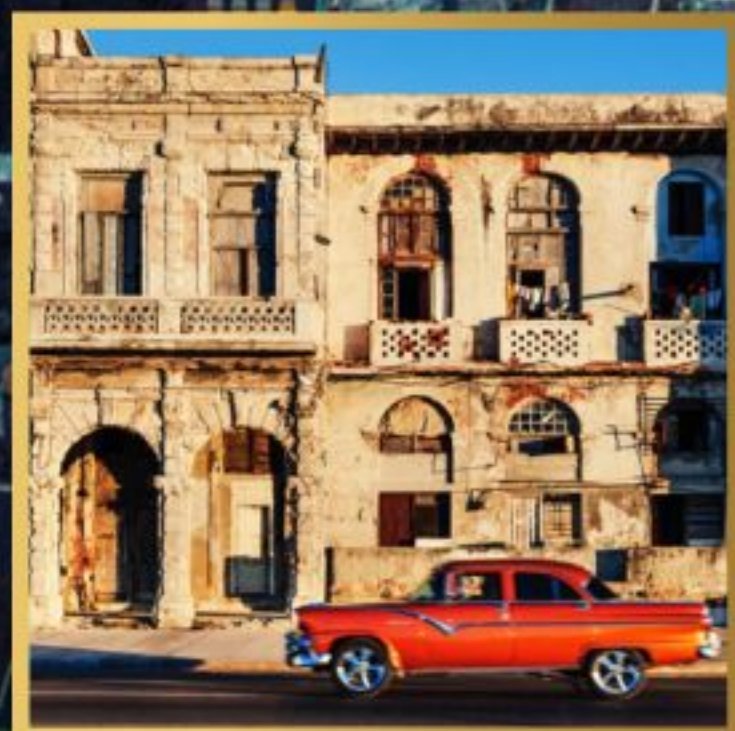
*Inside*  
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SIGHTS &  
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EXPERIENCES**

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# WELCOME

The world is full of fascinating, diverse, exciting and cosmopolitan cities, each with its own extraordinary stories, culture, cuisine and history. In 101 World's Greatest Cities we take you on a journey through the very best from each continent and bring you essential advice on planning your perfect city escape. Whether you're looking for enchanting architecture, stunning scenery, beautiful beaches, incredible history or something entirely different, there's something here for everyone. From Rome and Rio to Toronto and Tokyo and everywhere in between, come and discover the many riches that the world's greatest cities have to offer. Enjoy!





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# 101 WORLD'S GREATEST CITIES

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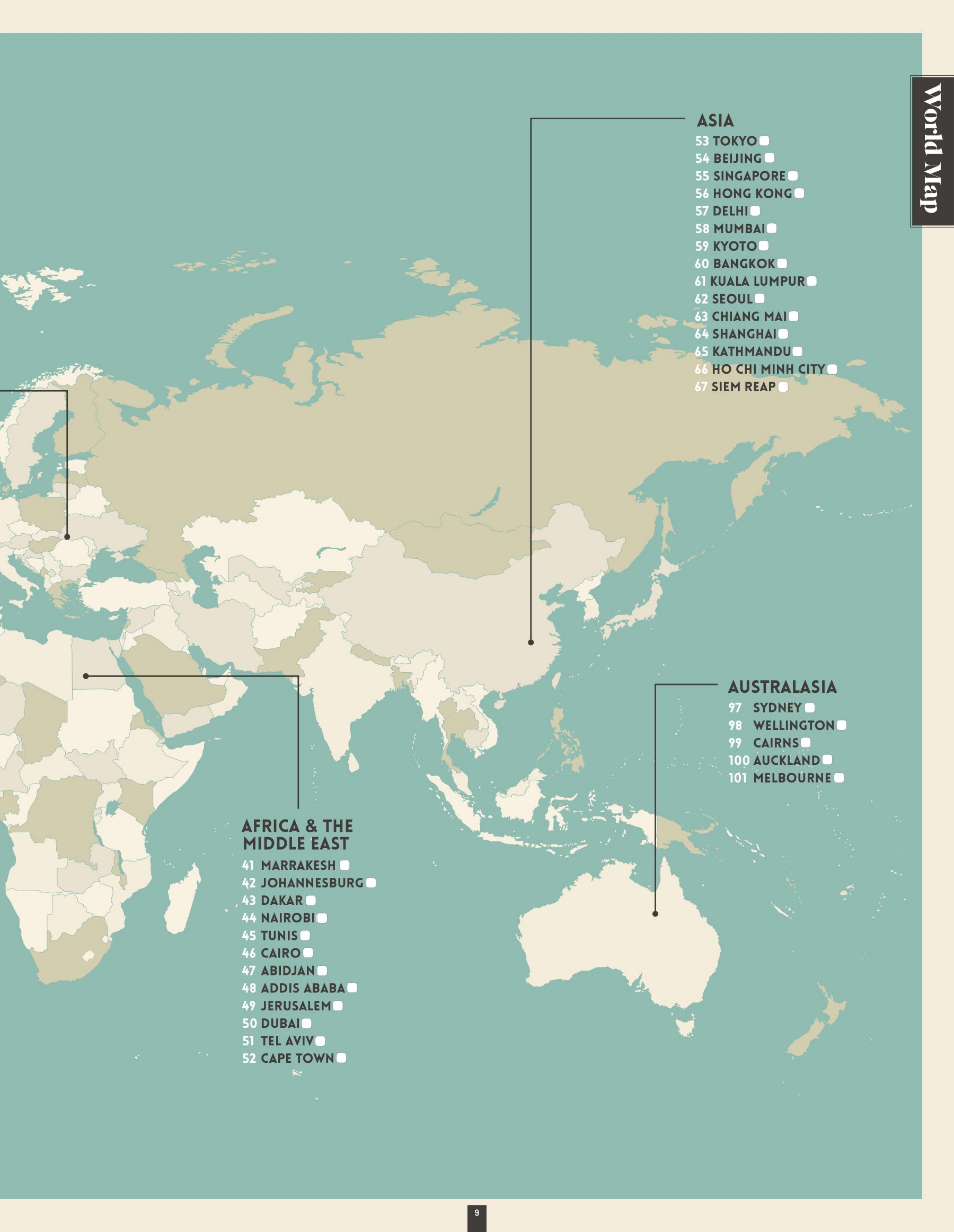
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# ROME

VISIT THE STUNNING CAPITAL OF ITALY AND  
EXPERIENCE A PART OF HISTORY

Rome's capital will take you on a journey into the past while enabling you to enjoy the cosmopolitan buzz of a fashionable city. Explore ancient Roman ruins, soak up the art and culture, and enjoy the incredible cuisine.

Begin your day with a trip to the Colosseum, then take a walk through the Roman Forum and on to the Pantheon. The Colosseum is a spectacle not to be missed – it's the largest amphitheatre ever built, and still an icon of Imperial Rome. Even if you don't want to venture inside, you'll really regret not taking the time to see it in person. The area around it can feel a little daunting; the roads are wide and busy, but there are some lovely restaurants close by where you can enjoy a traditional lasagne with a view of the spectacular structure. The Colosseum is striking at any time of day, but imagine sitting in view of it with a glass of Italian wine as the sun sets and streams through its many arches. We really can't think of many things better than starting and ending your day at this stunning building.

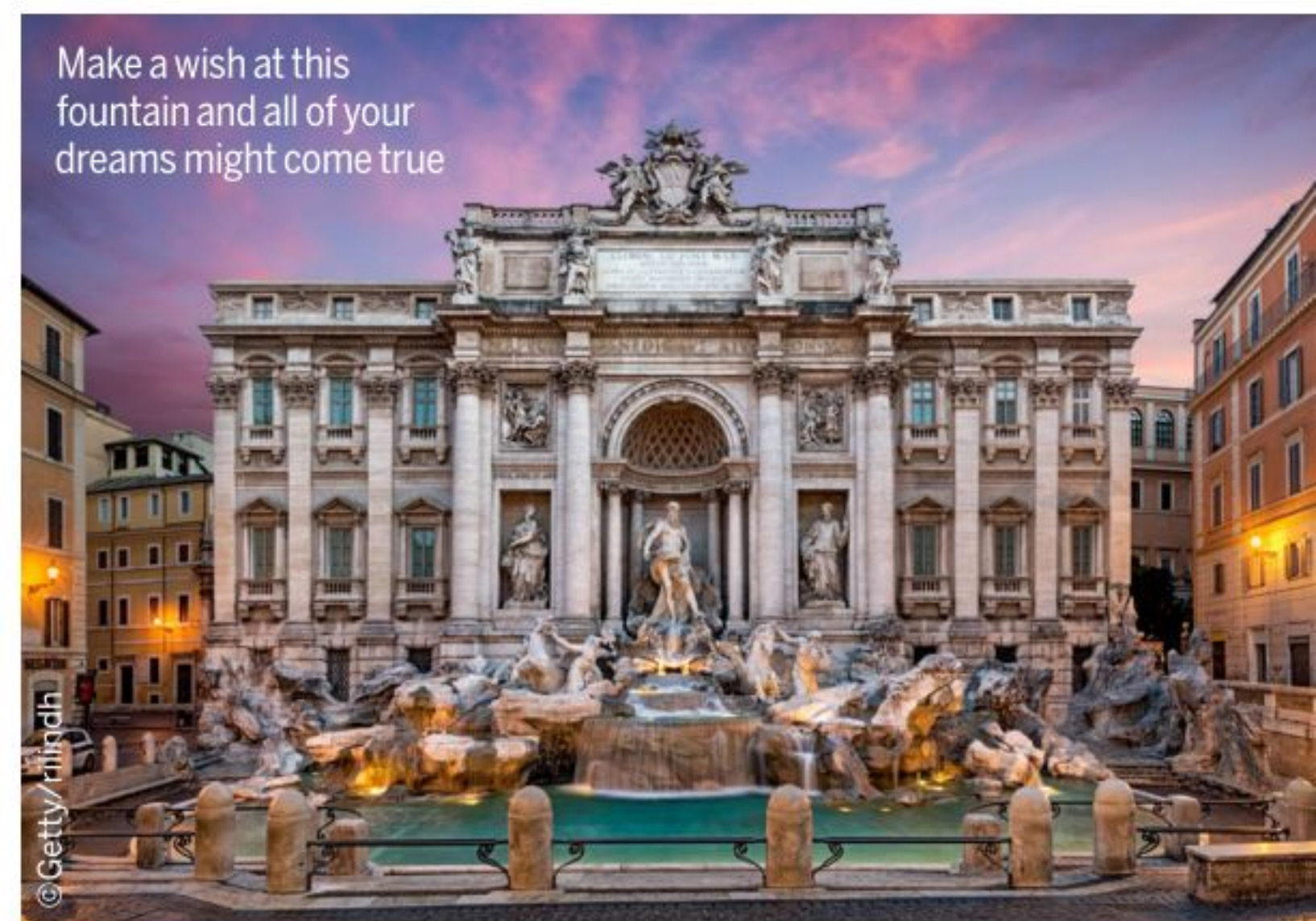
The Roman Forum is another iconic landmark of the Roman Empire. It's filled with temples, squares and old government buildings that are well worth taking a stroll around. You can

explore it alone or join a tour to learn about the interesting history of the site. Nearby the Pantheon is a 2,000-year-old temple, the best preserved of all of Rome's ancient monuments. It is one of the most influential buildings in the Western world. Venturing through its large, bronze doors and into the largest unreinforced concrete dome ever built is probably as awe-inspiring and breathtaking as it was when it was first constructed. Despite its age, it's still as stunning as ever.

Vatican City, the independent city-state, is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. A trip to the Vatican should be left for a day when you have nothing else planned, as there is a lot to see. It's home to St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums, which contain artistic masterpieces such as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes.

The Vatican is by far the city's most popular tourist destination, so be prepared for a lot of people and many, many queues. If this fills you with dread, just be sure to avoid Wednesdays, as this is usually when the Papal Audience takes place. This is when the Pope is in Rome, meaning there will be even more people. In the

warmer months, this is often held in St Peter's Square, so if you do want to get a glimpse of the Pope then head on down – just prepare yourself for a lot of people around! Visiting the Vatican Museums with a tour is by far the best way to do it, and between April and October you can book to visit the museum at night, which means there are fewer people to cope with. If you plan on visiting St Peter's Basilica, then you must be dressed appropriately – no bare knees, midriffs or shoulders on show.



Make a wish at this fountain and all of your dreams might come true

## ROME

### Essential information

Watch out for pickpockets, especially around busy piazzas and packed tourist destinations.

#### Best time to visit

*April to October (if you want to see the Pope!)*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VATICANTICKETS.ORG](http://WWW.VATICANTICKETS.ORG)

[WWW.ROME.INFO](http://WWW.ROME.INFO)

[WWW.COLOSSEUM-ROME-TICKETS.COM](http://WWW.COLOSSEUM-ROME-TICKETS.COM)



You can't move in Rome without a picture-perfect vista in your sights



Take a wander around the old government buildings of ancient Rome



©Getty/RudyBalasko

## “THERE ARE MANY PRETTY FOUNTAINS TO BE FOUND IN THE CITY’S PIAZZAS”

The most popular square in Rome, Piazza Navona, shouldn't be left off your itinerary. The piazza is lined with restaurants, cafes and swanky shops to explore – but it will definitely burn a hole in your wallet! The ornate fountain, Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi, sits at its centre too. Another piazza not to forget about is Piazza di Spagna, which is where the city's famous Spanish Steps are. It's a central meeting place for both locals and tourists, and a great place for people-watching and candid photography.

In the evening, take a romantic walk to the famous Trevi Fountain, and make a wish by throwing a coin in using your right hand over your left shoulder – a tradition at the fountain. Standing 26 metres (85 feet) tall and 49 metres (161 feet) wide, it is the largest Baroque fountain in the city. There are many pretty fountains to be found in the city's piazzas where you can enjoy a delicious Italian coffee, sample crisp white wine from the nearby Castelli Romani hills, and make sure you don't miss out on trying the gelato. On the way to the Trevi Fountain you'll stumble across Giolitti, which is Rome's oldest and best gelateria – well worth the pit stop.

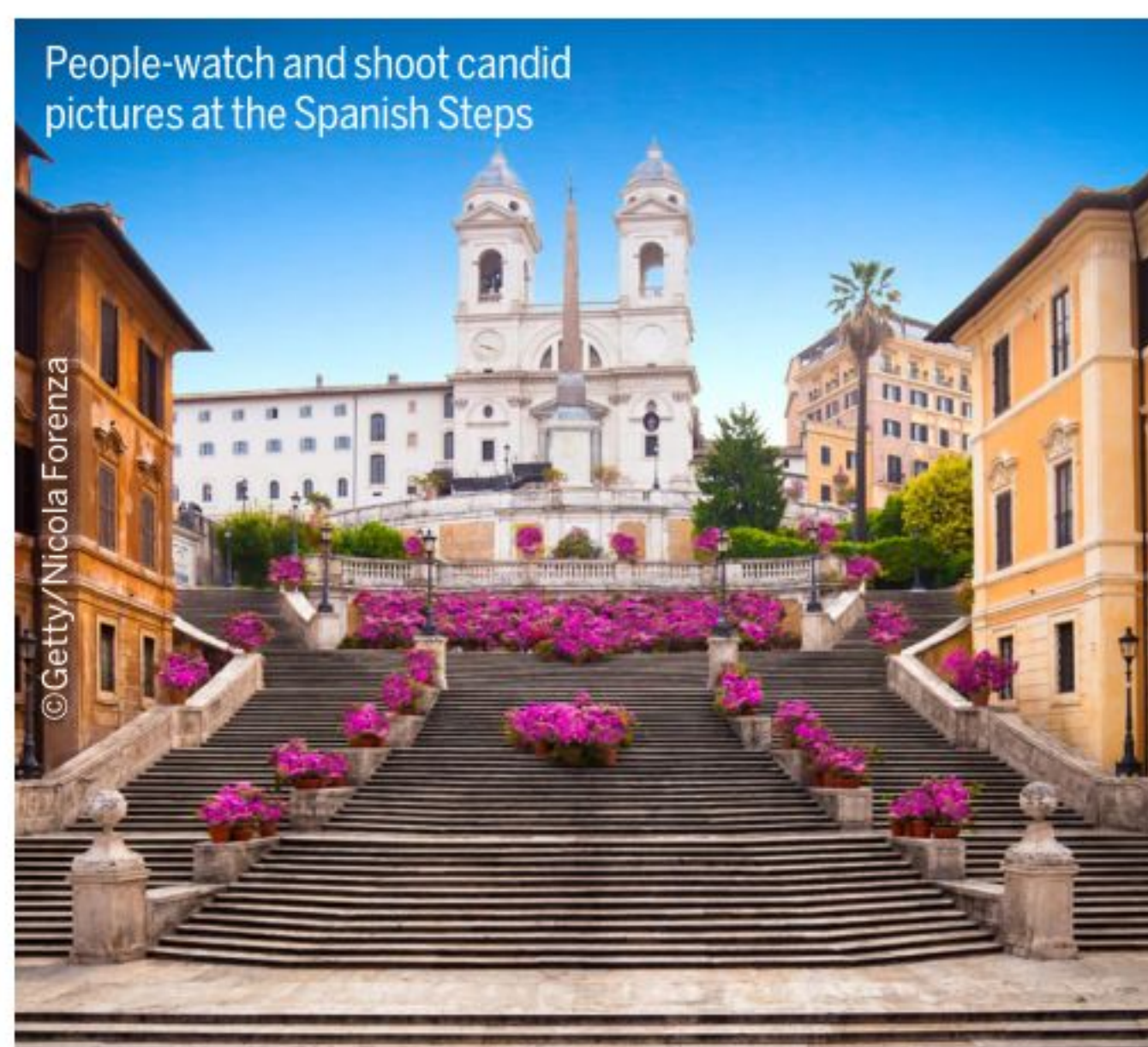
After a long day exploring the once 'caput mundi' (capital of the world), enjoy watching the world go by in one of the pizzerias or trattorias located within the many piazzas. Don't forget to sample traditional dishes that can only be truly enjoyed in Rome. Seek out a proper Roman carbonara, made with just a handful of ingredients, or look for the classic amatriciana, made with a rich tomato sauce and savoury pork cheek. Start your day with a local maritozzo, which is a sweet, yeasty bun containing raisins and pine nuts and filled with delicious whipped cream.

You could spend a whole day exploring the Vatican City and its beautiful art



©Getty/Gregor Schuster

People-watch and shoot candid pictures at the Spanish Steps



©Getty/Nicola Forenza

Europe



The Colosseum: one of the most iconic sights of Rome

©Getty/Marco Bottigelli



A trip to the ancient city is not complete without a visit here

©Getty/Kennet Havgard

## THE SISTINE CHAPEL

Visit the official residence of the Pope situated in the Apostolic Palace. The stunning chapel was originally called Cappella Magna and was named after Pope Sixtus IV, who restored it between 1477 and 1480. You can book tickets in advance in order to skip the queues and secure entry into an often-sold-out venue. It's located within the Vatican Museums, and access to the Sistine Chapel is included with your museum tickets. The Sistine Chapel is the last room you'll visit on your trip through the museums and the 54 galleries. They truly leave the best until last on this tour. It's absolutely stunning and very memorable.



Budapest comes alive at night, with its infamous ruin bars among the coolest places in the world to be

# BUDAPEST

THE PEARL OF THE DANUBE HAS PLENTY OF SECRETS TO UNCOVER

## BUDAPEST Essential information

The 100E bus from the airport will get you into downtown Pest within 40 minutes, but as an express service it's slightly pricier.

### Best time to visit

*Spring and autumn (to avoid the high heat and freezing cold)*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.BUDAPEST.COM](http://WWW.BUDAPEST.COM)  
[WELOVEBUDAPEST.COM/EN](http://WELOVEBUDAPEST.COM/EN)  
[WWW.BATHSBUDAPEST.COM](http://WWW.BATHSBUDAPEST.COM)



©Getty/focusstock

Since it is divided into two halves of Buda and Pest, the side of the Danube you choose to stay on in Hungary's capital perhaps says as much about you as it does the city itself. The former, on the west bank, is typified by its grand panoramic views over the city below, with a rather relaxed atmosphere as you stroll about the Castle District – though you may fancy taking the 19th century funicular to the top rather than brave the many steps to reach Fisherman's Bastion. Pest, on the other hand, is the busier downtown area, meaning it's here you'll want to go for exciting spots to eat, drink and party in equal measure.

As a tourist destination, Budapest is crammed with things to do. Architecturally, it's one of the most fascinating in all of Europe, ranging from its ornate, stuccoed buildings that line any street to the grandiose structures like the Parliament or

St Stephen's Basilica. Taking in all this grandeur is best done on the historic tram line two, which for the cost of just one ticket (roughly 90p/\$1.15) will let you take in the impressive sights of Széchenyi Bridge, Buda Castle, Gresham Palace, Gellért Hill and so much more besides. The ride is only made all the better when disembarking at the copper-green Liberty Bridge, where the nearby Great Market Hall has everything from traditional goulash soup to the popular street food snack lángos – deep-fried discs of dough served with cheese and sour cream.

You won't be lacking for choices when the Sun goes down, either. From Michelin-star restaurants like Onyx to gourmet burgers and fries at Zing Burger, Budapest is capable of catering for all tastes. This is particularly true of its party scene, too, which is primarily situated within the old Jewish Quarter. Gozsdu Courtyard is the centre

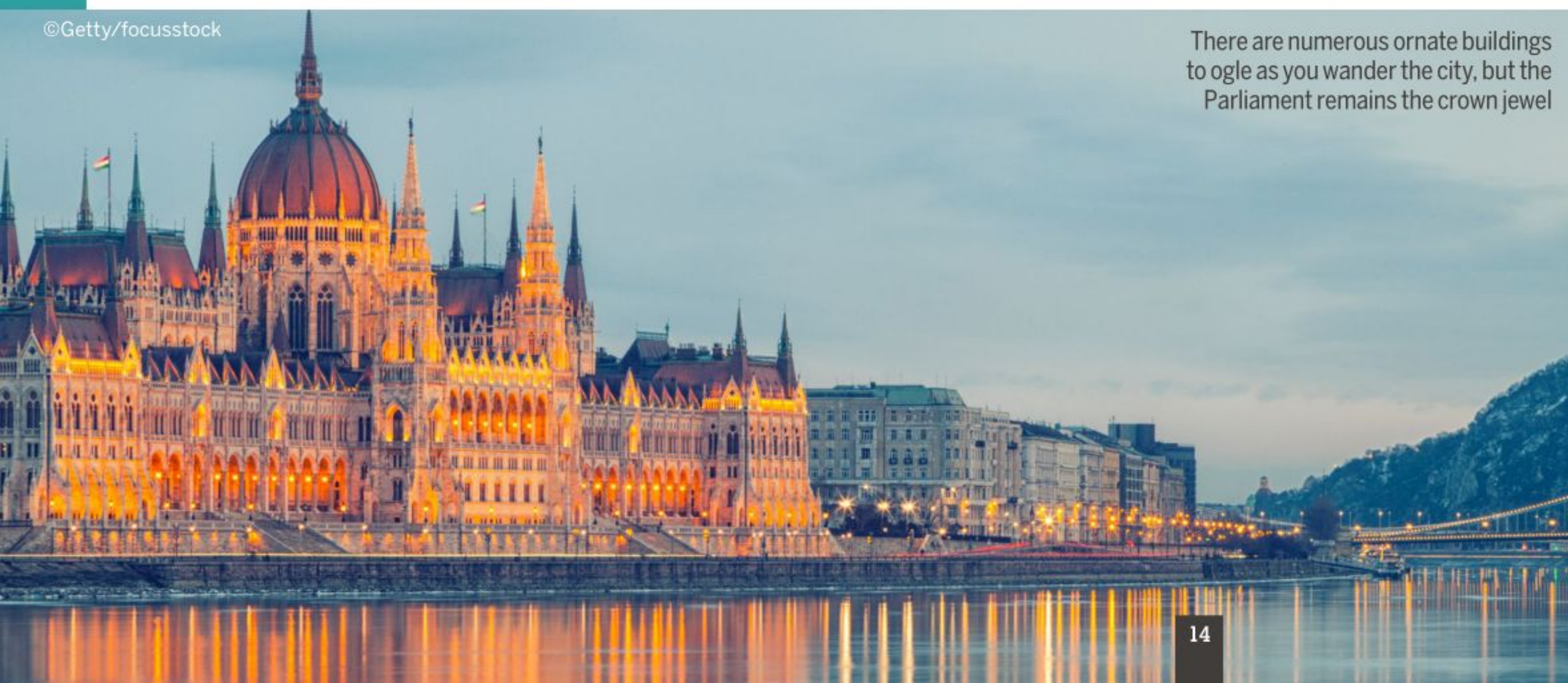


**ABOVE:** Matthias Church in the Castle District is just one of the city's many examples of Gothic architecture

of Budapest's nightlife, and you'll find the famous ruin bars only a short distance from here. A taste of the national drink pálinka is made all the more enjoyable (or tolerable) within Szimpla Kert, the complex of funkily decorated buildings that kickstarted the city's unique ruin bar scene. You'll be thankful for Budapest's numerous thermal baths the morning after, then, with the baroque-style Széchenyi Baths that sit in the middle of City Park being the most popular place to wash away the late-night grogginess.

In addition to the countless historical and cultural museums, a plethora of unique tours – try a city drive in a classic Trabant – and large, central parks, it might surprise you just how much there is to do in Budapest.

There are numerous ornate buildings to ogle as you wander the city, but the Parliament remains the crown jewel



©Getty/focusstock



# DUBLIN

ENJOY GUINNESS, LIVE MUSIC AND GREAT CRAIC IN IRELAND'S LIVELY CAPITAL

It may have a reputation of not being the prettiest of cities, but Dublin has so much to offer. Even on the darkest and dreariest of days, Dublin will still thrive – you just need to know the right places to go.

If you only have a few days, then we'd recommend that you try one of the hop-on, hop-off bus tours, as they are a great way to see a lot of the city very quickly. You can ride the whole circuit in one go or get off at one of the many tourist hotspots. Popular stops include the Guinness Storehouse, Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin Zoo, Temple Bar, Trinity College, Grafton Street, O'Connell Street, where the tour begins, and many more.

A trip to Dublin wouldn't be complete without a tour of the Guinness Storehouse. Even if you aren't keen on the drink itself, the stunning, panoramic views of the city from the top-floor Gravity Bar will make your visit worthwhile.

Discover everything there is to know about Guinness across the exhibits of the seven-floored converted grain house, from its history to how it is made today.

Wander along the banks of the River Liffey and walk across one of its 24 bridges in Greater Dublin, the most famous of which being the Ha'penny Bridge – the Liffey's first pedestrian crossing, dating back to 1816. Like the Pont des Arts in Paris, the Ha'penny has seen a spell of 'love locks' being attached to the famous railings by loved-up couples, although this has proven to be detrimental to the structure.

Another worthwhile place to visit is Kilmainham Gaol, a prison which first opened its doors to prisoners in 1796 and shut in 1924.

The site is steeped in Dublin history – see the courtyard where prisoners met their fates by firing squad, or the gallows where they were hanged for their crimes. Today, the Gaol is seen as a symbol of Irish Nationalism, as many of the leaders from the rebellion of 1798 and the Irish Civil War of 1922-23 were detained here.

Temple Bar is where you should head on an evening if you fancy a tippie and a jig. Though the area is famous for attracting stag and hen parties, the atmosphere in the many bars and pubs remains friendly. If you don't squeeze yourself into a pub that has standing room only, to listen (or sing along) to live traditional Irish music with a drink in your hand, then you may as well have stayed at home.

**“TEMPLE BAR IS WHERE YOU SHOULD HEAD IF YOU FANCY A TIPPLE AND A JIG”**

The Temple Bar Pub has traditional live music seven days a week

## DUBLIN

### Essential information

Sample Dublin's oysters with a pint of Guinness.

#### Best time to visit

*All year round*

#### Time zone

UTC



#### Useful sites

[WWW.DUBLINPASS.COM](http://WWW.DUBLINPASS.COM)

[WWW.DISCOVERIRELAND.IE/VISIT-DUBLIN](http://WWW.DISCOVERIRELAND.IE/VISIT-DUBLIN)

[WWW.DUBLINVISITORCENTRE.IE](http://WWW.DUBLINVISITORCENTRE.IE)





# ATHENS

GREECE'S ANCIENT CAPITAL IS FULL OF LIFE, PASSION AND CHARACTER – JUST ASK THE LOCALS

The historic Plaka is one of Athens' prettiest districts, with its colourful shop- and taverna-filled streets

## ATHENS

### Essential information

Stay just south of the Acropolis for more authentic, chilled-out neighbourhoods and better access to the beaches.

#### Best time to visit

*May and September to October*

#### Time zone

UTC+2

#### Useful sites

[WWW.THISISATHENS.ORG](http://WWW.THISISATHENS.ORG)  
[WWW.ATHENSGUIDE.COM](http://WWW.ATHENSGUIDE.COM)  
[WWW.VISITGREECE.GR/EN/MAIN\\_CITIES/ATHENS](http://WWW.VISITGREECE.GR/EN/MAIN_CITIES/ATHENS)



Europe's southernmost capital city gave birth to Western civilisation, but it's also making waves in the modern world. Athens is a vibrant place, where graffiti meets Greek gods, and you'll want to check out all it has to offer.

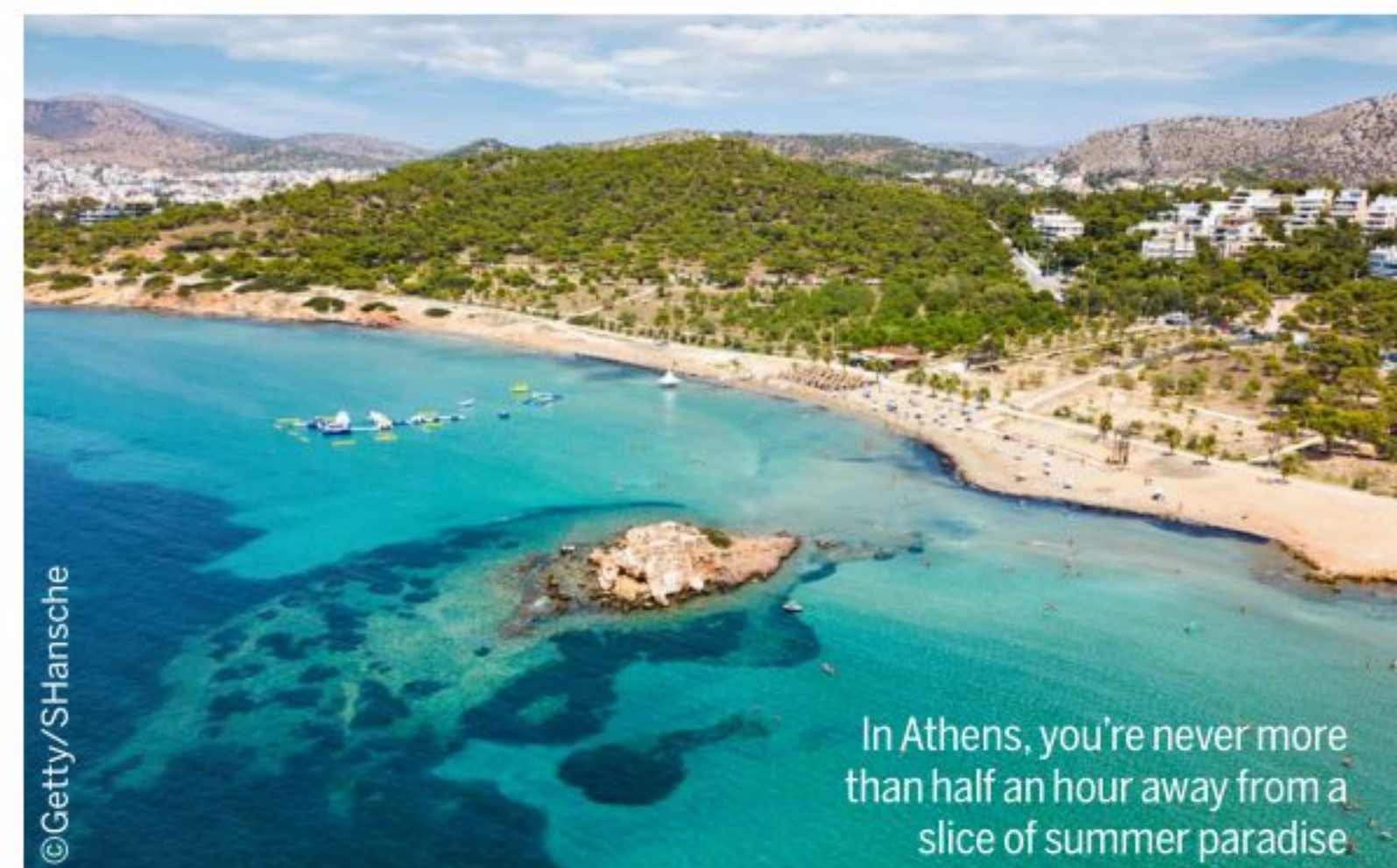
Athens' most iconic sight is its ancient Acropolis, complete with the Parthenon temple, Odeon of Herodes Atticus, and many more ruins. Start at the southern entrance and check out the remains of the ancient city as you work your way up the Acropolis. Pass under the mighty Propylaea and you'll be greeted with a breathtaking view of the marble Parthenon. From the top, admire the views spanning the city and take lots of photos standing beside the larger-than-life Greek flag. You can continue to get your ancient fix by exploring the Roman Agora, Hadrian's Arch and the windswept Temple of Olympian Zeus at the foot of the Acropolis.

If it's a more modern vibe you're after, just a stone's throw away is Syntagma Square, where the hubbub of modern Athens is in full swing. Check out the Greek parliament building or watch the hustle and bustle of the square from the rooftop bar at the Hotel Grande Bretagne. Walk to Kolonaki to enjoy its fancy shops and cafes, where Greek politicians and intellectuals rub shoulders with tourists. For a breath of fresh air, be sure to visit the National Botanic Gardens

and see the cute turtles as they splash about in freshwater ponds.

If you need a break from the Athenian heat, cool off at one of many spots nearby. Lake Vouliagmeni retains a pleasant temperature of around 20 degrees Celsius (68 Fahrenheit) all year, and is a popular destination among the locals. If you're looking for some seaside fun, Glyfada and Vouliagmeni are known for their lively beach bars, which often have swimming pools and dance floors to get you in the party mood – best enjoyed with a cocktail in hand.

As the sun sets over the Acropolis, the city truly comes alive. Watch a (subtitled) movie in one of Athens' quirky outdoor cinemas and mingle with Greek film fans. Later on, join the Greeks for dinner at about 9pm, when the tavernas and restaurants of the Plaka are at their busiest. Check out the many bars of Monastiraki, from high-end hotspots to traditional Greek music halls. Finish your night with a stroll along Dionysiou Areopagitou, and look up at the illuminated Acropolis as the warm wind blows around you. Athens is just as exciting now as it was two millennia ago.



In Athens, you're never more than half an hour away from a slice of summer paradise



The Parthenon was built to honour the goddess Athena

**"ATHENS IS A LIVELY PLACE, WHERE GRAFFITI MEETS GREEK GODS"**



# SALZBURG

MOZART, MARIA AND MORE IN AUSTRIA'S MUSICAL METROPOLIS

Hohensalzburg Fortress sits above the Old Town and offers stunning views

Europe

## SALZBURG

### Essential information

The Salzburg Card is a worthwhile investment, giving you free or discounted entry to many of the must-see sites.

### Best time to visit

*All year (depending whether you like sun or snow)*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[SALZBURG.INFO/EN](http://SALZBURG.INFO/EN)

[VISIT-SALZBURG.NET](http://VISIT-SALZBURG.NET)

[AUSTRIA.INFO/US/WHERE-TO-GO/CITIES/SALZBURG](http://AUSTRIA.INFO/US/WHERE-TO-GO/CITIES/SALZBURG)



©Getty/ Laszlo Szirtesi

Pay a visit to Mozart's birthplace and learn all about the composer's life



You'll probably recognise bits of Salzburg even if you've never been before. It's thanks to *The Sound of Music* – not only was the once-highest-grossing movie set in Salzburg, but most outdoor filming took place in the Austrian city, too. Follow the story of Maria von Trapp on one of the fun *Sound of Music* tours to the various locations, and join the playful crowds walking around the Mirabell Gardens singing *Do-Re-Mi*. It might be kitsch, but it's enormous fun.

There's more to Salzburg's musical heritage than singing nuns. The Hagenauer Haus in Getreidegasse is better known as the birthplace of Mozart and is now preserved as a museum about the world's greatest composer. Amble through the rooms of a middle-class 18th-century family home and see the child prodigy's first musical instruments. Mozart's second Salzburg home on Makartplatz was destroyed in a World War II air raid, but it has been lovingly rebuilt and opened to the public as a second museum, the Mozart Residence. Don't miss the pianoforte at which the genius worked. In addition, every evening you'll find concerts

featuring the work of the city's favourite son, with jazz and modern music bars providing an alternative for those who have had their fill of Wolfgang Amadeus. Daylight hours have harmonies and melodies floating in the air as classical music drifts from open windows and street performers busk and sing for spare change. For the best choice of entertainment, visit during the summer Salzburg Festival, when concerts, plays and operas are performed in every possible space across the city.

Beyond Salzburg's musical claims to fame is the Hohensalzburg Fortress. You can't miss it – it's the white castle that towers over the city atop the Festungsberg hill. The fortress can be reached via a steep path – reward yourself with a slice of strudel later – or with a sedate ride on the funicular railway. The views over the baroque Old Town are magnificent, and a chance to spot some of the other sights to tick off at your leisure. Must-sees include Salzburg Cathedral and Residenzplatz public square, Nonnberg Abbey, the trick fountains at Hellbrunn Palace, and the moving wrought-iron memorials in St Peter's Cemetery.

Salzburg prides itself on being the 'Stage of the World'. With an unmatched musical heritage and a stunning backdrop to perform in front of, it's hard to disagree.

**"THERE'S MORE TO SALZBURG'S MUSICAL HERITAGE THAN SINGING NUNS"**



Brandenburg Gate is Berlin's most famous landmark and has become a symbol of unity in a once-divided city

## BERLIN

### Essential information

Purchase a 'Berlin WelcomeCard' for unlimited use of the city's fantastic public transport system and discounts for some of the city's attractions.

### Best time to visit

*May or October (to avoid peak tourist times)*

### Time zone

UTC+1



### Useful sites

[WWW.BERLINER-UNTERWELTEN.DE/EN](http://WWW.BERLINER-UNTERWELTEN.DE/EN)

[WWW.BERLIN.DE/EN](http://WWW.BERLIN.DE/EN)

[WWW.EASTSIDEGALLERYBERLIN.DE/EN](http://WWW.EASTSIDEGALLERYBERLIN.DE/EN)

# BERLIN

## A CITY OF CULTURE AND COOL, GERMANY'S CAPITAL HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Berlin's fascinating history as a city formally divided into east and west feels emblematic of a place that always has the potential to reflect an opposite aspect of itself: it has high-culture and pop-culture, historic monuments and cutting-edge architecture, offers both space for calm reflection and a vibrant nightlife, world-famous tourist destinations and little-known secrets for the intrepid to discover. This is a city that is able to give you whatever it is you are looking for.

Two of Berlin's most iconic landmarks are within a stone's throw of each other and a must for visitors to the city. The Brandenburg Gate, completed in 1791, is not only a great photo opportunity, but a fascinating lens through which to view the tumultuous history of the city, from Napoleon all the way up to the Cold War, which you can learn about in the neighbouring museum. Nearby is the German parliament building, the Reichstag. A stunning juxtaposition of new and old, its historic architecture, which dates back to 1894, is complemented by a striking glass dome set atop it. The dome is open to the public, offering a glimpse into the debating chamber inside, and 360-degree views of the city outside.

A visit to the infamous wall that once divided the city is essential, and we'd recommend you make two stops. First, the Berlin Wall Memorial (Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer), which extends for 1.4 kilometres (0.9 miles) along Bernauer Straße, shows what the wall used to be like with surviving sections, a watchtower and a documentation centre to provide information on the impact the wall had on the lives of everyday people. For an alternative, but no less significant impression of what the wall and its fall meant to Berlin, check out the East Side Gallery, which has transformed a 1.3-kilometre (0.8-mile) stretch of the wall into an open-air art gallery featuring more than 100 paintings commenting on the political changes the city went through in 1989 and 1990.

If your taste for the city's architecture and history has only just been whetted, then head over to Gendarmenmarkt, a stunning square where you'll get a triple whammy of jaw-dropping buildings in the form of Berlin's 19th century concert house and not one, but two beautiful 18th century cathedrals in the form of the Deutscher Dom and Französischer Dom.

Lest we get lost staring into the past, let's remember that Berlin is also a lively, dynamic

24-hour city with so much to do in the here and now. There are a host of interesting neighbourhoods to visit, packed with great food, cool cafes and original bars. Known as the home of Berlin counterculture, Friedrichshain offers cafes, vegan dining, clubs and outdoor cinemas; Kreuzberg, once at the epicentre of the east-Berlin punk scene and with a couple of historic squats still standing, is a hotbed of late-night bars, international street food and fantastic restaurants; and Neukölln is a beacon

**BELOW:** The East Side Gallery is an open-air gallery and the longest preserved piece of the Berlin Wall



©Cro Magnon / Alamy



## "THERE ARE A HOST OF INTERESTING NEIGHBOURHOODS TO VISIT"

for artists, boasting galleries, vintage shops and independent bars and cinemas.

The diversity of options on offer to Berlin's visitors is perhaps nowhere better summed up than in its museums. At Museum Island, you can visit five museums that cover 6,000 years of history via artefacts, art and architecture. The most popular museum is the Pergamonmuseum, which houses the Pergamon Altar, taken from the 2nd century ancient Greek city of Pergamon, and a reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate, originally constructed in Babylon in around 575 BCE. The Altes Museum houses a Greek, Etruscan and Roman collection; the Neues Museum contains Egyptian artefacts, including the bust of Queen Nefertiti; and there's also the Museum of Pre- and Early History. Finally, head to Bode-Museum and Alte Nationalgalerie for European sculptures spanning the Middle Ages and 18th and 19th century European art respectively.

As spectacular as these exhibits are, you should also consider museums not on the average tourist's itinerary. Subterranean Berlin (Berlin Unterwelten) is a museum offering tours of the city's underground structures, including abandoned subway stations, air raid shelters from World War II and tunnels used for East German citizens looking to escape to the West during the Cold War. If you're looking for something really unique, try the Monster

The Christmas market in full swing at the stunning Gendarmenmarkt



Kabinett. Here you'll find a warehouse full of bizarre robotic creatures and beastly sculptures, where actors from the art collective that runs it help create an atmosphere somewhere between museum and haunted house experience. That's not even to mention the computer games museum, the DDR Museum, which gives you a slice of life in the former DDR, and the many other attractions that can be discovered there.

A beacon of cool and culture; a city packed with stunning art and architecture; a place steeped in fascinating history yet with an incredible nightlife: Berlin truly has it all.

## THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

Berlin's Holocaust Memorial is close to many of the city's most popular tourist destinations, so will be easily accessible to any visitor. It consists of 2,711 concrete columns, creating a multifaceted maze for you to wander through and contemplate the enormity of the crime that was the Holocaust. Underground, you'll find an information centre that provides important context via exhibits that document the history of the Holocaust and give you a personal insight into some of its victims. Here, you will also find a room that shows images and short biographies of Jewish victims from across Europe, aiming to give these names a face and story.

**ABOVE:** Berlin's Holocaust Memorial was designed by artist Peter Eisenman and engineer Buro Happold



Berlin Cathedral can be found on Museum Island, home to some of the city's best museums





The coloured gable houses along Nyhavn are perhaps Copenhagen's most iconic sight

## COPENHAGEN

### Essential information

Many museums offer free entry once a week, usually on Wednesdays.

#### Best time to visit

*May to August*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITCOPENHAGEN.COM](http://WWW.VISITCOPENHAGEN.COM)

[WWW.VISITDENMARK.COM/DENMARK/](http://WWW.VISITDENMARK.COM/DENMARK/DESTINATIONS/COPENHAGEN)

[DESTINATIONS/COPENHAGEN](http://WWW.TIVOLI.DK/EN/)

[WWW.TIVOLI.DK/EN/](http://WWW.TIVOLI.DK/EN/)



# COPENHAGEN

## DISCOVER SCANDI STYLE IN THE CONSTANTLY EVOLVING DANISH CAPITAL

**B**ig isn't always best. Despite being one of the smallest capital cities in western Europe, Copenhagen regularly tops polls of the most desirable places to live. A day or two spent here and it soon becomes obvious why.

With its compact size, flat terrain and a profusion of cycle paths to follow, few cities are better set up for two-wheeled journeys. Join the waves of rush-hour cycle commuters on a bike tour, a quick-and-easy way to see the main sights. Among the highlights is the residence of the royal family, the Amalienborg Palace. Arrive at noon to see the changing of the guard on the octagonal courtyard between four identical palace buildings. The maintenance of tradition is less of a priority at Christiania, a self-governing free town established by hippies squatting in an abandoned army barracks in the 1970s. Graffiti-daubed, self-built homes share space with colourful converted military buildings. Locals not only sell art and crafts to the visitors who wander their streets, they also openly tout cannabis, despite the fact that it is illegal in Denmark. It's a

remarkable contrast to the pomp and formality of the royal quarter.

Copenhagen is constantly rejuvenating its long-lived reputation as a centre of style. The city's cutting-edge restaurants have won 15 Michelin stars and a host of boutique shops have sprung up in Strøget, Pisserenden and the Latin Quarter. One of the best places to see the effortlessly cool locals pass by is from a cafe near the brightly painted canal-front houses of Nyhavn. Among the former residents of this pretty street is Hans Christian Andersen, who penned several of his fairy tales behind the door of number 20.

A short walk away is Tivoli Gardens, the second-oldest amusement park in the world. Contrast the Rutschebanen, a wooden rollercoaster constructed in 1914 that weaves in and out of a snow-capped mountain, with the modern metallic loops of The Demon. So impressed was an American animator who visited in the middle of the 20th century that he headed back home and began planning his own version: Disneyland. Tivoli has avoided sprawling into the kind of enormous

and overwhelming tourist trap that many of its imitators have become, and the city around it is the same. Compact Copenhagen combines a small-town feeling with interesting attractions and a laid-back style. Those polls aren't wrong – to borrow the slogan of the city's brewery, it's probably the best city in the world.



**ABOVE:** Ample bike parks and paths make Copenhagen a two-wheel-friendly city



# DUBROVNIK

## CROATIA'S STUNNING SEAPORT IS WORTHY OF ITS WORLD-RENOWNED REPUTATION

With its enticing combination of history, culture and coastal scenery, it's no wonder that Dubrovnik has become one of the most popular choices for European holidays in recent years.

Begin your tour of Dubrovnik with a walk along its iconic city walls. The two-kilometre (1.2-mile) stretch provides some of the best views of the Old Town, as well as stunning panoramas of the azure-tinted Adriatic Sea. The first of Dubrovnik's city walls were constructed in the 9th century, with defences being fortified in the 14th century, and forts added to protect against Turkish attacks in the 15th century. These fortresses can be observed as you walk the walls, and your admission ticket will give you access to Fort Lovrijenac, one of the city's most fascinating fortresses and a recognisable filming location from *Game of Thrones*.

Access to the city walls is granted via two historic gates, Pile and Ploče. Pile is more popular

among tourists, so you can get a jump on the crowds by starting your stroll at Ploče. The walk provides little shelter and can be notoriously hot on sunny days, so prepare for scorching weather and take lots of water to avoid overpaying at opportunistic vendors.

Other historic sights to witness in Dubrovnik include Rector's Palace, a Gothic-Renaissance palace that doubles as a cultural history museum; the Franciscan Monastery, which houses a 14th-century pharmacy; and the Large Onofrio's Fountain, which spews drinkable water from the mouths of 16 ornately carved masks.

You can take in the whole city at once from Srd, a 412-metre (1,352-foot) hill that overlooks Dubrovnik and provides unbeatable views of the Old Town, the island of Lokrum and the Elafiti Islands. The easiest and most enjoyable route to the top is via cable car – head up just before sunset to see Dubrovnik at its most enchanting and magical.

Once you're done sightseeing, why not mix things up with a spot of sea kayaking? The activity is a popular pastime in Dubrovnik, and a fun way to get active while enjoying a different perspective of the local scenery. It's easy enough to kayak your way across to the lush island of Lokrum as part of a guided tour. The car-free isle is a popular spot for swimming and relaxing on the beach, and provides a tranquil retreat.

All that walking and paddling is hungry work. Luckily enough, Dubrovnik is filled with restaurants that serve some of the best food in Croatia. The specialities here are based on locally caught seafood, and include grilled fish and squid risotto – head to Lokanda Peskarija or Restaurant Proto for some of the best.

For a drink, D'vino offers cosy vibes and an excellent selection of Croatian wine, making it a popular choice, or you can enjoy intoxicating ocean views while sipping beverages at one of two popular cliff-top bars: Buža I and Buža II.

Dubrovnik's well-preserved Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site



### DUBROVNIK

#### Essential information

Buy a Dubrovnik Card for free access to many popular attractions, including the city walls.

#### Best time to visit

*April to June*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISIT-CROATIA.CO.UK/CROATIA-DESTINATIONS/DUBROVNIK](http://WWW.VISIT-CROATIA.CO.UK/CROATIA-DESTINATIONS/DUBROVNIK)  
[WWW.DUBROVNIKCARD.COM](http://WWW.DUBROVNIKCARD.COM)  
[WWW.CHASINGTHEDONKEY.COM](http://WWW.CHASINGTHEDONKEY.COM)





# SEVILLE

FILLED TO THE BRIM WITH HISTORY, CULTURE AND PASSIONATE LOCALS, YOU'LL DEFINITELY FEEL THE HEAT IN THIS FIERY SPANISH CITY

Occupied by Romans, Muslims and Castilians over the years, you'd think Seville lacked a distinct culture of its own. But while it's certainly been influenced by its inhabitants, Seville retains a fiercely independent spirit and Andalusian personality. Walking through the narrow, shady streets of its Old Town, you'll see colourful flamenco dresses fanning elegantly out of shops, and gazpacho soup served from every tapas bar in sight.

When you emerge from these labyrinthine streets, you may be greeted by a great square, with the Royal Alcázar on one side and Seville's mighty cathedral on the other. You'll want to allow at least half a day to explore the Alcázar, for it is actually three palaces (a Christian one, a Muslim one and a military one). The perfectly symmetrical gardens are arguably the highlight

of your visit, so sit down for a cool drink in the cafe and take in the gorgeous aroma of the fruit trees. You can then cross the square to go inside the elaborate cathedral, where some of Spain's most famous figures are buried. Go up La Giralda, an old minaret-turned-bell tower that stands over 100 metres (328 feet) tall.

If you want to explore Seville's more modern side, head south of the city centre to the huge Parque de María Luisa. Whizz round on a bike as you explore its sprawling greenery, perhaps stopping for a picnic under the trees. Inside the park, you'll find the incredible Plaza de España – a grand courtyard and palatial building, constructed for the 1929 World's Fair. It's perfect for an Instagram shot, and you'll find other pretty pavilions dating back from the Fair in the area too. The former Royal Tobacco Factory in the grounds

of Seville University is also worth a look, and you'll learn about Seville's fascinating working-class history there.

Head back into the Old Town to clamber up the Metropol Parasol, an interesting sculpture which seems to resemble a wave washing over the city. Built in 2011, it claims to be the largest wooden structure in the world – but it's the view from the top that makes it stand out. A pathway winds up and down the structure's roof, offering a complete 360-degree panorama of Seville's Old Town. It's best visited towards the evening, when the city starts coming to life again.

As the Sun sets, cross the Guadalquivir River to the Triana district, the home of authentic Sevillian life. Bullfighters, flamenco singers, Spanish dancers and gitanos (Roma people) once called its streets home, and the vibrant nightlife and character of this neighbourhood that you can still experience today are their legacy. It's the perfect place to sip a glass of sherry and round off your city break in Seville.

**"YOU'LL SEE COLOURFUL FLAMENCO DRESSES FANNING ELEGANTLY OUT OF SHOPS"**



## SEVILLE

### Essential information

Summers in Seville are some of the hottest in Europe, so be prepared for a long, lazy siesta in the mid-afternoon.

#### Best time to visit

*April/May, for the Feria (Spring Fair)*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.SEVILLE-TRAVELLER.COM](http://WWW.SEVILLE-TRAVELLER.COM)

[WWW.VISITASEVILLA.ES/EN](http://WWW.VISITASEVILLA.ES/EN)

[WWW.ANDALUCIA.COM/CITIES/SEVILLA.HTM](http://WWW.ANDALUCIA.COM/CITIES/SEVILLA.HTM)



The Plaza de España in María Luisa Park is a vast construction, built for the 1929 World's Fair





# BRUGES

HISTORY, CULTURE AND GREAT FOOD  
MEET IN THIS FAIRY-TALE TOWN

With Flemish buildings lining the streets, narrow alleyways and little stone bridges over the Dijver, Bruges is more than picturesque – it is straight from the pages of a fairy tale. It's the perfect setting for classical paintings, something that the likes of Jan van Eyck realised. So why not head to Bruges and find out for yourself?

The first thing you'll notice about the city is its beauty, but staring at buildings will get old eventually. Never fear, there's plenty to do besides wandering the streets and drinking in the medieval atmosphere.

Perhaps best known is the Markt, one of the town's main squares, and it's where most visitors head on their first day. From here, streets lead off like spokes to other parts of town, but it's here that you'll see its most famous building – the Belfort. Made famous by films like *In Bruges*, you can climb the 83-metre (272-foot) tower and, for a small fee, get a quick history lesson and a fantastic view over the rooftops. Other museums include the Archaeological Museum, Choco-Story (for all those chocoholics) and the Gruuthusemuseum, which focuses on the history of Bruges. You can even visit the Frietmuseum, all about the history of Belgium's famous fries, from potato to plate to condiments.

Of course, the Belgians are known for other foods, and you'll find them all in Bruges. The smell of fresh waffles wafts down the main streets, while cafes and bars litter the town. And while we're on the subject, no trip to Bruges is complete without a visit to the Halve Maan Brewery. Tours start from around £10 (\$13) for adults and include one of the brewery's beers at the end. If you don't want to go round the brewery, you can sit in the courtyard and enjoy the Sun as you sip.

Getting to Bruges is pretty straightforward, with a direct train line to Brussels, and everywhere in the city centre can be reached on foot. In fact, some of the best days you'll have will be poking around the back streets and walking along the canals.

**BELOW:** Bruges is a dream destination for food lovers and especially those with a sweet tooth

## BRUGES

### Essential information

Belgium is a bilingual country, but Bruges is in the Flemish-speaking part. It's a difficult language to learn, but don't worry – most people will speak English!

#### Best time to visit

*All year round*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITBRUGES.BE/EN](http://WWW.VISITBRUGES.BE/EN)

[WWW.VISITFLANDERS.COM/EN/DESTINATIONS/BRUGES](http://WWW.VISITFLANDERS.COM/EN/DESTINATIONS/BRUGES)

[WWW.HALVEMAAN.BE/EN](http://WWW.HALVEMAAN.BE/EN)

10



Take a walk at dusk to see  
Bruges in a whole new light

**“THE SMELL OF FRESH WAFFLES WAFTS  
DOWN THE MAIN STREETS”**

©Getty outcast85







## BARCELONA

### Essential information

There are numerous multi-day travelcard options to take advantage of in Barcelona.

#### Best time to visit

May-June

#### Time zone

UTC +1



#### Useful sites

[WWW.BARCELONATURISME.COM/WV3/EN/](http://WWW.BARCELONATURISME.COM/WV3/EN/)  
[WWW.BARCELONA.COM](http://WWW.BARCELONA.COM)  
[WWW.BARCELONAPASS.COM](http://WWW.BARCELONAPASS.COM)



Though still a work in progress, the towering spires of the Sagrada Família are a breathtaking sight

# BARCELONA

## BARCELONA IS A CITY OF FAMILIAR SIGHTS WHERE THE INFLUENCE OF ONE MAN RISES HIGH

Barcelona has existed as a city for more than 2,000 years, in which time it has accumulated a wealth of staggeringly beautiful buildings, monuments, museums and unmissable sights.

One of the first things on your list of things to see and do in Barcelona has to be the enormously impressive Sagrada Família. This iconic basilica was designed by renowned Catalan artist Antoni Gaudí in the 1880s, but astonishingly is still under construction. Due to the firing of the original architect, Gaudí's untimely death, wars and bureaucratic red tape, the church isn't due to be completed until 2026, but it is still incredible to see the collection of

spires soaring into the sky, high above the city. There is a museum within the basilica to explore, but the Sagrada Família is an unmissable part of Barcelona's story, both inside and out, with a fascinating history to boot.

However, if you like your cathedrals a little more complete, Barrio Gótico is your best destination. This charming medieval district is home to a number of essential Barcelona sights, the most iconic of which is the Catedral de la Santa Creu. This stunning creation was started in the late-13th century and completed in the 15th, meaning it has been a Barcelona landmark for well over 600 years. The cathedral has Gothic and Roman features and is certainly worth a visit.

After your trip around the cathedral, take some time to explore the rest of the area, as it is full of everything from markets to historic monuments.

Another essential sight is the Montjuïc Castle, which has stood since the mid-17th century at the top of Montjuïc Mountain. This castle retains many of the original features and battlements, proving to be both an educational and fascinating exploration through Spain's military history. It's a good 173 metres (568 feet) above sea level so, if you can face the steep climb, you'll be rewarded with wonderful views over the city and the Balearic Sea.

Another chance to enjoy Barcelona from the sky can be found at the Mirador de Colom.





## GAUDÍ CITY

We have already learned a lot about Gaudí's most famous piece of work in Barcelona – the Sagrada Família – but his influence stretches far and wide across the city. The Casa Milà is one of the most eye-catching and polarising buildings in the world. As with the Sagrada Família, the building of this enormous family home was beset with difficulties, which resulted in its unique appearance. It's now open to the public as an activity centre and museum and has to be seen from all angles to truly get an understanding of why this UNESCO Heritage Site is both loved and hated in equal measure. More successful was Park Güell – a Gaudí-designed residential park that was commissioned by Barcelona-born businessman Eusebi Güell in the early part of the 20th century. The park is now public property but retains all the quirky, mind-boggling designs that Gaudí became renowned for.

**ABOVE:** You won't see a building anything like the Casa Milà anywhere else in the world

This statue, which has stood for 130 years, commemorates Christopher Columbus's decision to dock at Barcelona port following his successful journey to America, and shows the famed explorer holding a map and pointing the way. You can take a lift 60 metres (200 feet) up inside the column for panoramic views of the city, taking in the cathedral, the Montjuïc Castle and Collserola Natural Park. The Mirador truly is a breathtaking sight, whether you're looking at it or looking out from it.

The Mirador is situated on La Rambla, one of Barcelona's main boulevards that sits at the very centre of the city. It's a popular artery from

which to branch out and explore other areas of Barcelona. One such area is the similarly named Rambla de Catalunya, which is much quieter and is lined with shops and restaurants. Another place for you to get your shopping fix is La Boqueria Market. Barcelona is one of the foodie capitals of the continent and this is where the city shows off its most glorious array of fresh vegetables, meats, seafood and fruit. If you want to enjoy some local produce as well as some of the best tapas Barcelona has to offer, then La Boqueria, which calls itself the world's best market, is certainly the place to go.

Not only is it famous for its architecture and food, but Barcelona also has a global reputation for sport. FC Barcelona is one of the world's most successful football teams, and taking in a match or tour of the iconic Camp Nou stadium is essential for any self-respecting football fan. Barcelona also played host to the 1992 Olympics, so a tour of the Olympic Stadium is a fascinating experience for anyone intrigued to see the place where Great Britain's Linford Christie famously won 100-metre sprint gold.

Kids are also well catered for in Barcelona, with the Tibidabo Amusement Park an incredibly fun day out for kids and adults of all ages. The park is packed with entertaining rides, stalls and activities that you could comfortably spend an entire day enjoying. It is much more reasonably priced than many British amusement parks, so could be a chance for a kid-focused day that won't cost the Earth.

Barcelona offers so much as a travel destination and can be comfortably seen in a long weekend or a wonderful week away, enjoying the city sights as well as the beaches that Spain is so famous for.

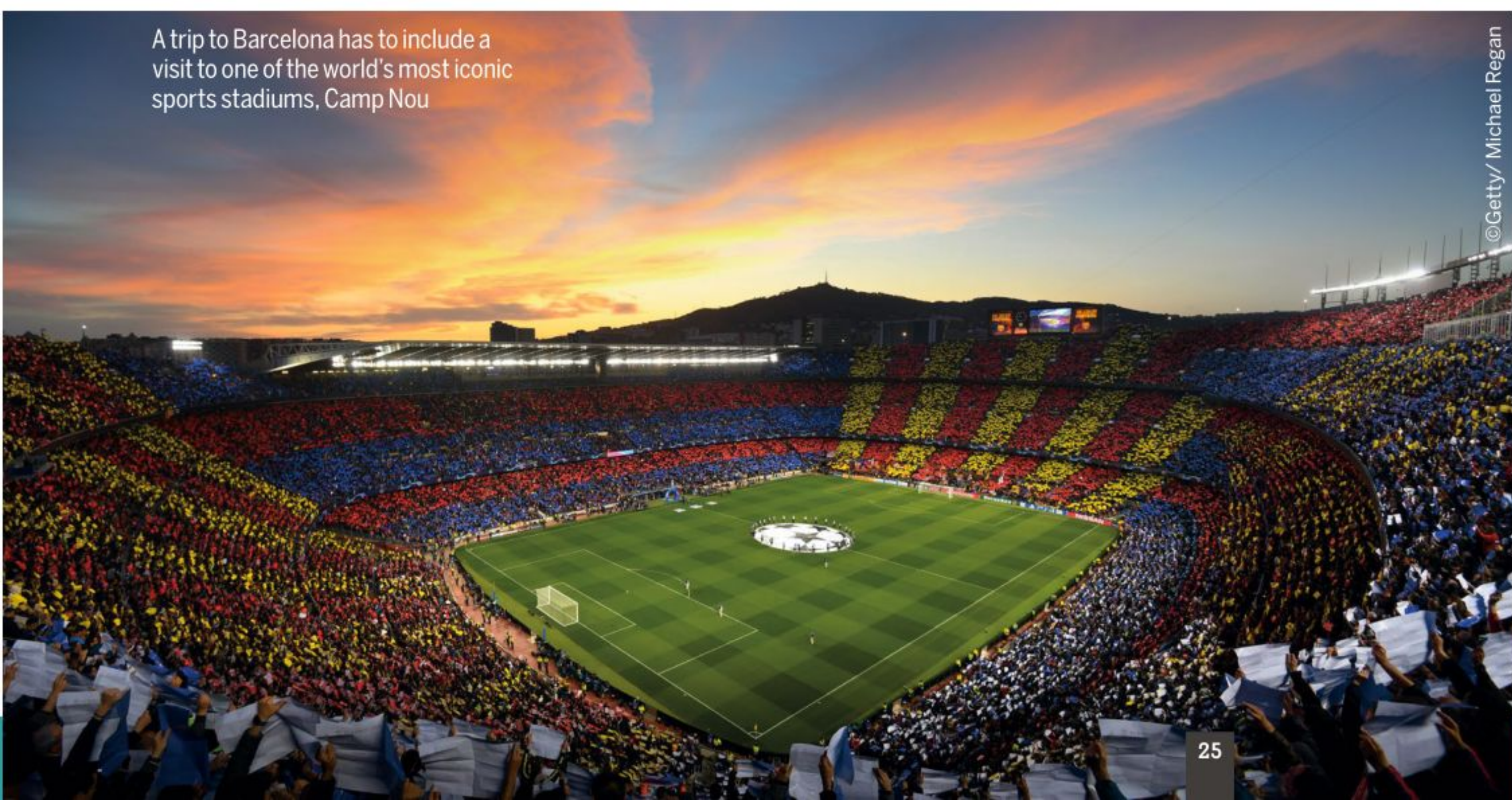
Barcelona is a truly cosmopolitan city. It has the charm and history of an ancient city, while having the modern qualities that make it the ideal travel destination for families, couples or single travellers looking to soak up the Sun, culture, food and history of one of Europe's oldest and most famous cities.

Gaudí's Park Güell not only offers the chance to see some quirky architecture but also spectacular views over the city

**BOTTOM:** Barcelona's Barrio Gótico (Gothic Quarter) is famous for its labyrinth of narrow streets



A trip to Barcelona has to include a visit to one of the world's most iconic sports stadiums, Camp Nou





There's a tranquillity to Zürich that comes from its closeness to and appreciation of its natural surroundings

## ZÜRICH

### Essential information

Getting the Zürich Card will allow for unlimited travel on all forms of transport for 24 or 72 hours.

#### Best time to visit

*June to August*

#### Time zone

UTC +1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.ZUERICH.COM/EN](http://WWW.ZUERICH.COM/EN)

[WWW.ZVV.CH/ZVV/EN/HOME.HTML](http://WWW.ZVV.CH/ZVV/EN/HOME.HTML)

[WWW.PUBLIBIKE.CH/EN/PUBLIBIKE](http://WWW.PUBLIBIKE.CH/EN/PUBLIBIKE)



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# ZÜRICH

**SITTING AT THE POINT WHERE RIVER MEETS LAKE, THIS SWISS CITY IS CONTEMPORARY, CULTURAL AND KITSCH**

Not many would place Zürich high on their list of cities to visit, and in truth Switzerland as a whole is often better suited to nature lovers looking for challenging hikes or to make the most of its Alpine skiing. But it's hard not to fall in love with Zürich from the moment you step onto its idyllic streets. It's a wealthy city, there's no denying that, but it's a culturally rich one, too. You will want to make the most of its numerous museums and galleries, key among them being the Kunsthau east of where the River Limmat meets the lake that gave Zürich its name. With artworks from the Middle Ages through to an exhibition dedicated to Dadaism and surrealism, the Kunsthau is a great place to start your cultural tour of the city.

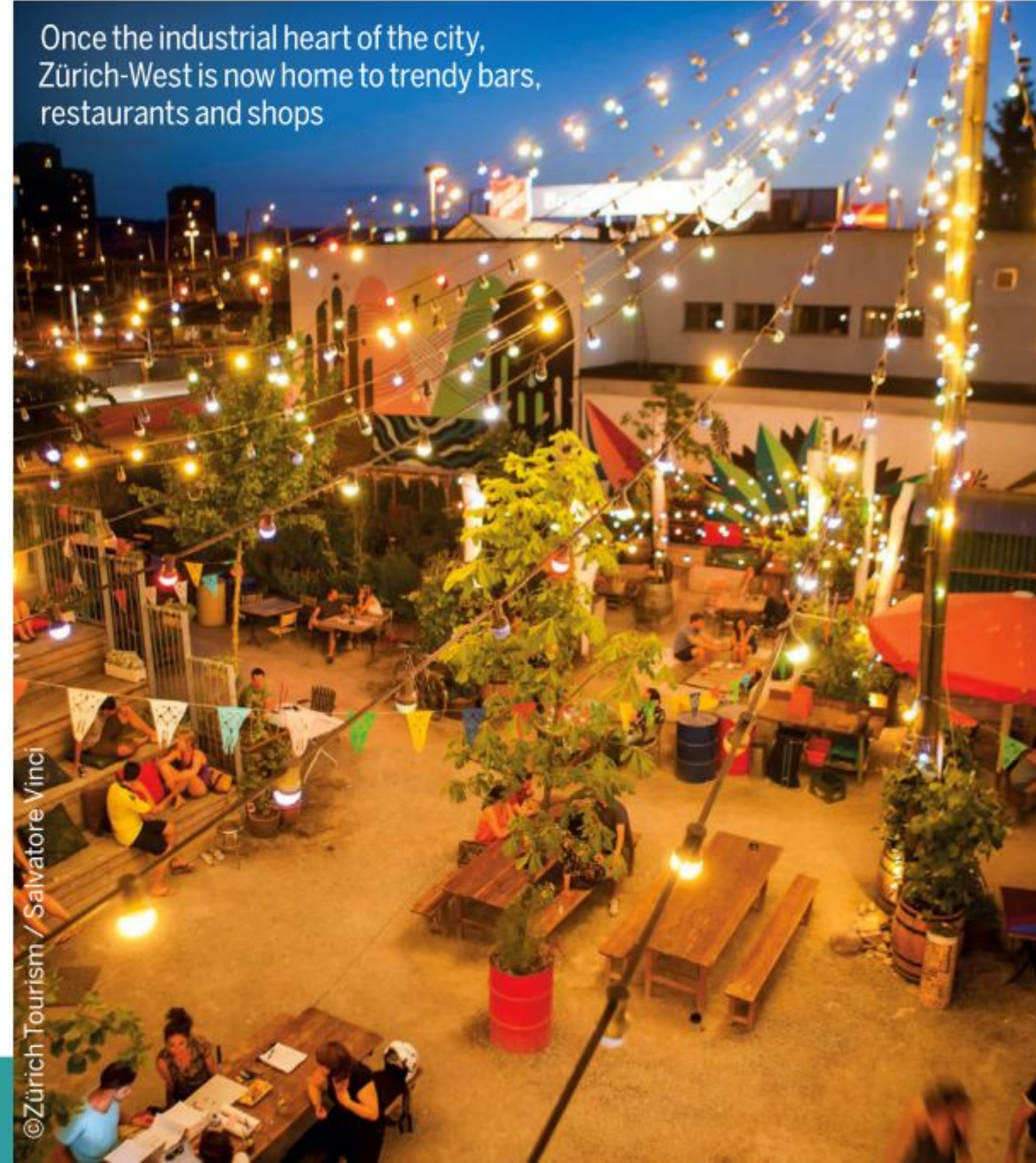
From there you'll want to head west, winding through the restrained architectural beauty of Zürich's Old Town and the sorts of simple elegance that is so often typified by Switzerland. The city is incredibly accessible by foot, and as

you criss-cross over bridges and catch glimpses of the lake, it'll be impossible not to give into temptation and take a step into one of the city's numerous chocolatiers – how could you visit Zürich and not indulge in the country's most famous export?

But the Swiss city isn't only about its quaint, old-world charm. The wealth of the city born from its popularity with the world's financial institutions has given rise to a hip, contemporary side, and when you're ready to eat it's in its trendy Zürich-West that you'll find yourself. Away from the clock towers and church steeples, the cobbled streets and narrow pathways, Zürich-West is a modern revitalisation of an area once used for factories and dockyards: now it's the bohemian centre of the city, and artists and designers have sought to use the space for more creative purposes. Railway arches have been converted to boutique stores, highway underpasses are cool street food venues, and

numerous bars and restaurants will keep you entertained until the early morning.

In that sense you may find a lot of contrast in Zürich: the modern with the traditional, indulgent with the meagre, the natural with the architectural. In any case, it's about time you put it on your list of places to visit.



Once the industrial heart of the city, Zürich-West is now home to trendy bars, restaurants and shops

**“THE SWISS CITY ISN'T ONLY ABOUT QUIANT, OLD-WORLD CHARM”**



# PRAGUE

## EXPLORE THE STUNNING ATTRACTIONS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC'S CAPITAL CITY

Prague is nicknamed the 'city of a hundred spires', but it doesn't take long before you realise this architectural gem, nestled within the Czech Republic and cut through by the Vltava River, cannot solely be defined by such a single set of features. Notwithstanding the fact that it's factually incorrect – there are more than 1,000 spires, turrets, steeples and towers gently punching the air over this capital city – Prague can be anything to anyone: romantic, fashionable, artistic, bustling and quiet on the one hand; a foodie's paradise, eclectic watering hole or simply a chocolate-box feast for the eyes on the other.

Take a boat ride soon after you arrive and you can soak up the splendour of those medieval buildings, unspoiled by war and modern development, before putting your feet on firm ground in pursuit of the key attractions. Get your timing right and you'll be able to see the world's oldest working astronomical clock in action, a thing of beauty that dates back to 1410 and stands in the Old Town Square. A performance takes place every hour where four animated figures shake their heads to the ring of a bell while the 12 apostles filter past two open windows to the amazement of the massed crowds.

From there, you can make your way over to the Jewish Quarter, a historical area in which Jews were once restricted to living. There are six glorious synagogues, an old cemetery, the 18th-century Old Jewish Town Hall, and many monuments and artefacts that form the Jewish Museum in Prague. They can be seen by purchasing an entry ticket, and it's worth paying for the Old New Synagogue alone – it's Europe's oldest surviving and active synagogue, and steeped in legend.

Prague's compact nature means you can easily get around on foot. South of the Jewish Quarter is Charles Bridge, crossing the Vltava and enabling crowds to mass along a walkway some ten-metres (33-feet) wide. Construction of the bridge began in 1357, and it has seen numerous battles and natural disasters since then. Most notable here are 30 mostly Baroque statues and statuary positioned across its length of 621 metres (2,037 feet). They're all replicas today, with the originals removed for safe keeping, but they're no less striking for it.

It certainly hasn't affected Prague's status as one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites, and that's little wonder. Each twist and turn of Prague's narrow streets offers up copious delights, and while you'll be charged to visit many of the splendid attractions, there's plenty to do for free.



Church of Our Lady  
before Týn by the Old  
Town Square

Europe



### PRAGUE

#### Essential information

Watch out for currency scams offering 0% commission – and don't exchange on the streets of Prague!

#### Best time to visit

*Spring and early autumn  
(for milder weather)*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.PRAGUE.EU/EN](http://WWW.PRAGUE.EU/EN)

[WWW.HRAD.CZ/EN](http://WWW.HRAD.CZ/EN)

[WWW.JEWISHMUSEUM.CZ/EN/INFO/VISIT](http://WWW.JEWISHMUSEUM.CZ/EN/INFO/VISIT)



Wandering the complex around Prague Castle, which contains the Bohemian Crown Jewels, will cost nothing (although entry will). There's also a huge, bronze horse statue (a monument to Hussite General Jan Žižka on Vitkov Hill, and free tours of the Rudolfinum concert hall.

Whatever you do, though, don't leave without visiting the New Town, in particular the politically iconic Wenceslas Square and the National Museum. Be sure to also sample the traditional

Czech soup kulajda; the thin pancakes called palacinky; or vepro-knedlo-zelo, which is roast pork, bread dumplings and stewed cabbage. Such food goes down well with beer, which is just as well since it is plentiful and cheap, and there are many breweries that encourage visitors. Just take it easy: with so much to see and do, you'll want a clear head come the morning, although a stroll around Letná Park may help – as long as you don't stop for a drink in its beer garden.



# FLORENCE

A SHRINE TO THE RENAISSANCE ERA, THIS CITY IS BRIMMING WITH ART AND CULTURE

This historic Italian city, nestled in the Tuscany region, is as beautiful as it is fascinating. For starters, Florence is one of the few cities on the globe whose historical centre is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its invaluable contributions to art, history and culture. Here, art lovers and history geeks alike will find plenty to entertain them.

At the centre of the city is the Piazza della Signoria. The most famous square in Florence, it is considered the political heart of the locality, whose government operates from the neighbouring town hall, the Palazzo Vecchio. The square itself has played a vital role in many important historical moments such as the Bonfire of the Vanities in 1497, when supporters of Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola collected and tossed thousands of objects such as cosmetics, art and books that were said to tempt sin into a large fire pit constructed in the square.

Much like the history of Florence, the art it displays is famous across the globe. Inside the Uffizi Gallery, which is just minutes from the square, is a rare gem of 15th-century Renaissance art and one of Botticelli's finest

pieces: *The Birth of Venus*. Approximately two kilometres (1.2 miles) away, inside the Galleria dell'Accademia, visitors can gaze upon Michelangelo's famous *David* statue, which he carved from a single block of marble in the early 16th century at the age of just 26.

Approximately 450 metres from the gallery, situated at the centre of the city's main market district, you will find the church of San Lorenzo, one of Florence's biggest churches and said to have been consecrated by St Ambrose on Easter Day, 393 CE. This impressive monument also contains the Medici Chapel, the famous mausoleum of the Medici family – the most powerful and influential family in Florence between the 15th and 18th centuries.

One of the greatest masterpieces of Gothic architecture to be found in Florence is the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore (the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower.) This Florentine cathedral is one of the largest churches in Christianity and was a symbol of wealth and power in the city during the 13th and 14th centuries as it was the largest cathedral in Europe, with a capacity for 30,000 people.


**FLORENCE**

**Essential information**

From the main city centre, cross the river for a more authentic taste of Florence.

**Best time to visit**

*April to June*

**Time zone**

**UTC+1**

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VISITFLORENCE.COM](http://WWW.VISITFLORENCE.COM)

[WWW.FLORENCE-TOURISM.COM](http://WWW.FLORENCE-TOURISM.COM)

[WWW.ITALYHEAVEN.CO.UK/TUSCANY/FLORENCE/INDEX.HTML](http://WWW.ITALYHEAVEN.CO.UK/TUSCANY/FLORENCE/INDEX.HTML)

**CURRENCY**

€

**EURO**

The 463 steps up the cathedral offer the best view of the city. From the top, you'll be able to take in the wondrous sight of the city, while the adjacent Giotto's Campanile (bell tower) allows for a view of Florence's famous Duomo, which is largely responsible for the iconic silhouette of the Florence skyline.



Surrounded by the idyllic Tuscan hills and bisected by the beautiful Arno River, Florence's Renaissance landscape has remained unchanged for centuries

©Getty/Rudy Balasko



Absorb the grandeur of  
the Red Square

## MOSCOW

### Essential information

Learn to love bad customer service.

#### Best time to visit

*Between April  
and May*

#### Time zone

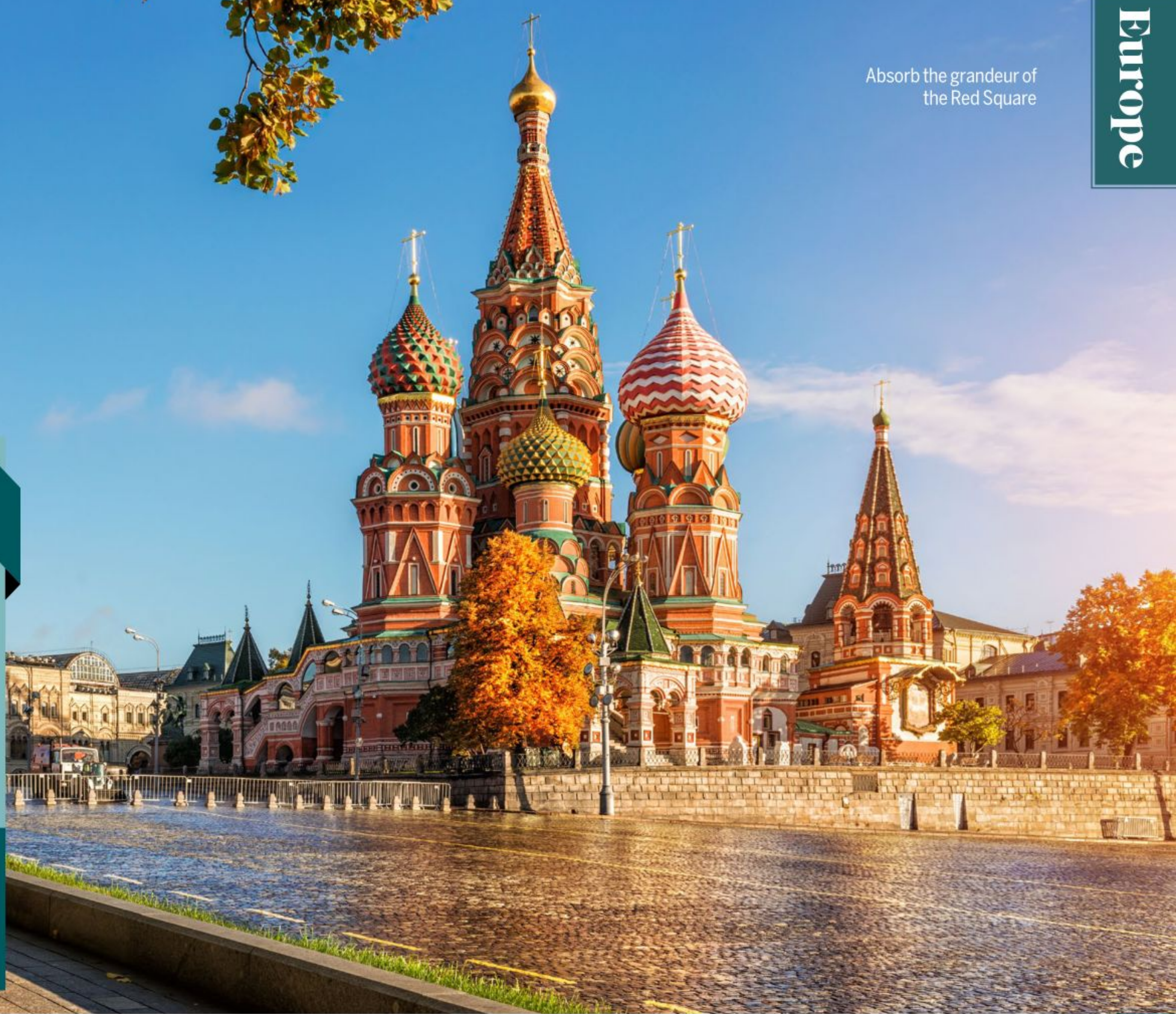
UTC+3



#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITRUSSIA.ORG.UK/DESTINATIONS/MOSCOW](http://WWW.VISITRUSSIA.ORG.UK/DESTINATIONS/MOSCOW)  
[WWW.VISITRUSSIA.COM/CITIESGUIDE/MOSCOW/MOSCOW.HTM](http://WWW.VISITRUSSIA.COM/CITIESGUIDE/MOSCOW/MOSCOW.HTM)  
[WWW.MOSCOW.INFO](http://WWW.MOSCOW.INFO)

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# MOSCOW

SIP VODKA, INDULGE ON CAVIAR AND BE SWEEPED AWAY BY INCREDIBLE ARCHITECTURE

Politics may deter many visitors from venturing into Russia, but this is a really stunning city not to be missed.

If you find yourself in Moscow, you have to make time to visit the Kremlin. It is where, for hundreds of years, autocratic tsars, communist dictators and modern-day presidents have ruled. The Kremlin, located on the Moskva River's north bank, is surrounded by high walls and is best viewed from across the river. You don't have to just admire the Kremlin from afar though. Purchase an entrance ticket from the ticket office and explore all five church museums and the Patriarch's Palace. The ticket doesn't include the Armoury, the Diamond Fund Exhibition or the Ivan the Great Bell Tower, but those can be bought separately. For something extra special, visit the Kremlin between April and October at noon in order to watch the change of guards at Sobornaya Square in the centre of the fortress.

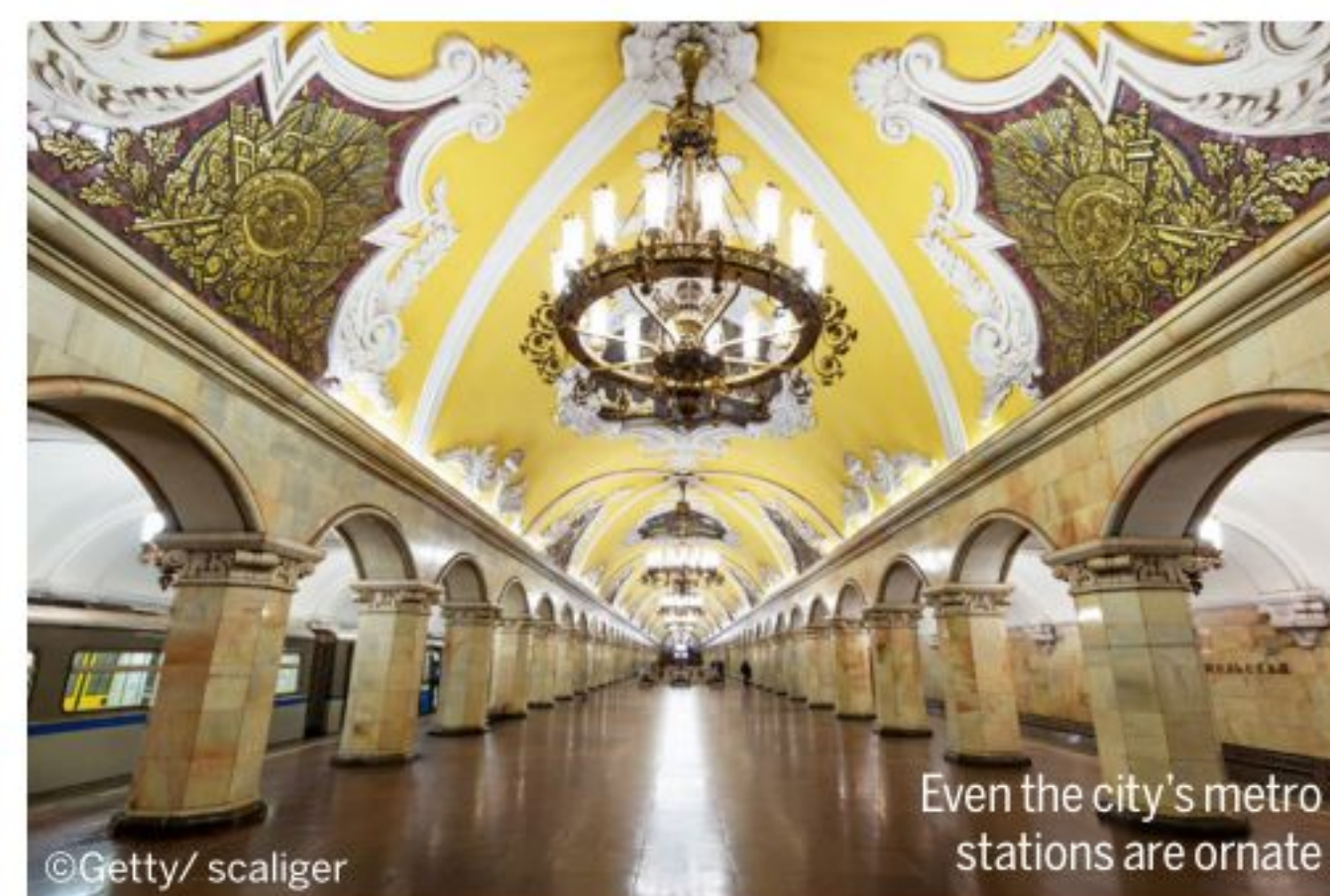
On the outer edge of the Kremlin wall is Red Square, which sits at the heart of Moscow. At the southern end you'll find St Basil's Cathedral, which will most likely be the heart-stopping scene that you want to capture for your holiday album. Next to the cathedral you'll see an elevated

platform called Place of Skulls, which was used for reading out decrees and proclamations in the past. Beware that the square is often closed for various celebrations, or military rehearsals, so make sure you check ahead when you know what day that you want to go.

We'd also recommend that you check out the Bolshoi Theatre on your trip to Moscow. It is the city's oldest theatre and home to the famed Bolshoi Ballet Company. Take an evening and enjoy a performance of a classic Russian ballet, like Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, for a splash of Russian culture.

Stroll through the streets of Moscow and take in the stunning architectural beauty of the city's churches and museums, or wander down Tverskaya Street. Known as Moscow's fashion street and main street, it is also one of the most expensive streets in the world.

You can't take a trip to Moscow without sampling some of the local cuisine and of course, the vodka. Caviar is something of a speciality in



Even the city's metro stations are ornate

Moscow, along with exotic soups, dumplings and pancakes. The best caviar in Moscow is found at Cafe Pushkin, where you can sample sterlet caviar, sturgeon caviar, beluga caviar, and golden caviar with pancakes. The three-storey restaurant is open 24 hours a day, so you'll be able to get your caviar fix whenever you fancy. Each floor has its own menu and theme – the Pharmacy, Library and the Fireplace Room – so you can guarantee an experience like no other.

**“ENJOY A PERFORMANCE OF A CLASSIC RUSSIAN BALLET, LIKE THE NUTCRACKER”**





## LONDON

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## Essential information

You can buy or top up an Oyster travel card or use a contactless bank card for London transport.

## Best time to visit

*March to May (for mild weather and flowers in bloom) or June to July (for royal palace openings)*

## Time zone

UTC

## Useful sites

[WWW.TFL.GOV.UK](http://WWW.TFL.GOV.UK)
[WWW.LONDONPASS.COM](http://WWW.LONDONPASS.COM)
[WWW.HRP.ORG.UK](http://WWW.HRP.ORG.UK)


The Elizabeth Tower is often called Big Ben, but this is in fact the name of the bell

## LONDON

FROM RED PHONE BOXES TO BLACK CABS, THERE'S AN ICONIC SIGHT ON EVERY CORNER IN ENGLAND'S CAPITAL CITY

Samuel Johnson once said: "When a man is tired of London, he's tired of life." London is one of the most vibrant cities in the world. It's packed with things to see and do, from beautiful architecture and history to iconic landmarks and, of course, the Royal Family! It's a shopaholic's paradise, a culture vulture's dream and a major foodie hotspot. But beyond this, every neighbourhood has something unique to offer.

Red telephone booths, double-decker buses and the Underground are synonymous with London, but the city is full of iconic sights. One of the most famous landmarks is Big Ben. You can't take a trip to London without taking a photograph in front of the Elizabeth Tower and Houses of Parliament. Mistakenly, most people think Big Ben is the 96-metre (315-foot) clock tower, but it is in fact the massive 13-ton (13,760-kilogram) bell. It's a spectacular sight to see, particularly when lit up at night. Tower Bridge is another landmark that often appears on postcards. One of the city's most famous bridges, its high-level walkways not only offer incredible views of the city, but a different perspective of the River Thames through its glass floor.

There are countless places for epic views, but arguably some of the best vistas can be seen from the London Eye, Europe's largest

observation wheel. There is also The View from The Shard; London's tallest building offers the highest viewpoint at 244 metres (800 feet).

If history is what you're after, the Tower of London is the place to visit. This royal palace, fortress and infamous prison encompasses more than 1,000 years of history. Visitors can meet the iconic 'Beefeaters', hear tales of torture and execution, and visit the Crown Jewels at this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

London has three other World Heritage Sites: the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey, Maritime Greenwich, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The Palace of Westminster is not only a stunning piece of Victorian Gothic architecture, but it's also home to the Houses of Parliament. Next door, Westminster Abbey is Britain's coronation church and the venue for Prince William and Catherine's wedding.

London has some unique neighbourhoods from affluent Mayfair to bohemian Camden, but the leafy area of Greenwich has some of the best highlights, including the Royal Observatory, National Maritime Museum, Cutty Sark and Greenwich Market. Here you can visit the home of Greenwich Mean Time, see the uniform that Nelson was wearing when he was killed at the Battle of Trafalgar, discover the world's largest surviving tea clipper, or sample delicious food.

While 30 minutes from the city centre, Kew Gardens highlights its greener side. The world's most diverse collection of living plants is housed here. Hyde Park, Hampstead Heath, Richmond Park, The Regent's Park and St James's Park are just a few of the other green spaces that draw attention to London's natural beauty.

While spring is one of the best times to visit to see London in bloom, if you want a regal day out, you'll have to come in the summer when Buckingham Palace, the Queen's official London residence, opens to the public. From the Changing of the Guard – a formal ceremony of the Queen's guards in their red uniforms and bearskin hats – to the 19 lavish stately rooms inside, the palace never fails to impress. Other awe-inspiring palaces include Kensington, the birthplace of Queen Victoria; and Hampton Court, Henry VIII's favourite royal residence. If you still haven't had your royal quota, visit St Paul's Cathedral to see where Prince Charles and Diana were married. Climb the 528 steps to the Golden Gallery for spectacular views, or listen to the acoustics in the Whispering Gallery.

Designed by Britain's most famous architect, Sir Christopher Wren, St Paul's is not the only masterpiece. Christ Church at Spitalfields, the Old Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College and



the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel are all visually astonishing and worth a trip.

London has a plethora of beautiful sights to see, but it's also bursting with things to do. The city is packed with museums and galleries, many of which are free to visit. From the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum to Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* at The National Gallery, it's a treasure trove. Other cultural gems include Tate Modern and Tate Britain, the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Natural History Museum.

Music fans are just as spoilt for choice. Visit the shooting locations for some of the most famous album covers, including the Beatles' *Abbey Road*, or go to top-notch record stores and music venues. Among the best music venues are the Royal Albert Hall, Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, The Roundhouse in Camden and the O2, which hosts some of the biggest names in music.

But it's not just music and art. London has every form of entertainment from theatre in the West End or at Shakespeare's Globe, to nightclubs, pubs and bars. Have a pint at The George Inn near London Bridge, where Shakespeare once drank, or sip a James Bond martini at DUKES Bar.

Dozens of new bars and restaurants open every month, making the city a holy grail for foodies. From street food to fine dining, there's something for everyone. Visit Brick Lane for a curry, wander Borough Market or take your pick from one of almost 70 Michelin-starred restaurants. If you want the quintessential British experience, have a full English breakfast at a local cafe, enjoy afternoon tea at The Ritz, or eat fish and chips at Poppies.

London is also a fashion capital. From high-end boutiques in Mayfair to flagship stores on Oxford Street, you can shop until you drop. If you're after more than just clothes, Harrods and Fortnum & Mason are almost attractions in their own right,



and London's markets, especially Portobello Road, are the perfect place to hunt for antiques and one-of-a-kind items.

London has something for everyone. Kids can get a thrill riding the ArcelorMittal Orbit, the world's longest tunnel slide, and sports fans can visit Lord's, Wembley or Wimbledon.

It's such a multicultural city that you can dine on Asian food in Chinatown, watch French cinema at the Barbican, and learn Flamenco at the Southbank Centre all in one day. There are so many events from the Notting Hill Carnival to Chinese New Year. And there's always something different to do. Ride a narrowboat on Regent's Canal, watch street performers in Covent Garden or visit Sherlock Holmes' Baker Street home.

One of the best things about London is that it's ever-changing. You could visit a dozen times and never run out of new things to discover. You may get tired trying to do it all, but like Samuel Johnson, you'll never get tired of London.

## FAIRY-TALE VISIT

You can see palaces in London, but if you're making the journey to the UK, you might as well make a trip to one of the best known of them all. Take a day trip to see the world's oldest castle and the venue for two recent royal weddings. Walk in the footsteps of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle or Princess Eugenie and Jack Brooksbank who were both married here.

Windsor Castle is the largest occupied castle, covering 13 acres (five hectares). It is currently one of the Queen's residences, and she spends most of her private weekends here. The castle has more than 900 years of history and has been home to 39 monarchs.

Take an audio tour narrated by Prince Charles to visit the opulent state rooms and marvel at the Gothic architecture of St George's Chapel. When else will you get to wander a castle?

It's a one-hour train journey from London, but very much worth it for a magical day out.



## "YOU COULD VISIT A DOZEN TIMES AND NEVER RUN OUT OF THINGS TO DISCOVER"



If you want to tour Buckingham Palace, you'll need to visit between the end of July and September





# STOCKHOLM

## WORLD-LEADING STYLE, CULTURE AND FLAVOUR ARE YOURS FOR THE TAKING IN SWEDEN'S CAPITAL CITY

Scandinavia has become synonymous with cool, minimalistic design and a forward-thinking approach to modern life. Stockholm epitomises this identity like nowhere else. The Swedish capital is as effortlessly cool as the well-dressed, friendly folk who live there, offering city breaks that combine unique museums, laid-back dining and good old-fashioned urban exploring.

Stockholm is spread across 14 islands. You might think that this would make it tricky to get around, but the city has an excellent public transport system, and most destinations are within walking distance of one another. Bring some sturdy boots if you plan on visiting in winter; Stockholm's icy streets can take their toll on shoe leather after a long day of strolling between landmarks and cafés.

Begin your Swedish sojourn in Stockholm's aesthetically appealing Old Town. The island of Gamla Stan is at the heart of the city, and is home to the Royal Palace (Kungliga Slottet). With more than 600 rooms, museums

and galleries, this enormous building is the official residence of the King of Sweden. Take a tour of the royal digs, and be sure to check out the Changing of the Guard ceremony.

Other worthwhile sights on Gamla Stan include Stockholm Cathedral and the Nobel Museum. Perhaps the best way to soak in the area is to simply amble around its cobblestone streets, taking time to marvel at the historic sights you'll see along the way.

To experience how modern residents live, head for the quirky and hip island of Södermalm. This is one of the best places in the city to browse boutique stores and stock up on the coolest Scandinavian fashion, taking inspiration from chic locals hanging out in the area's enviable selection of cafés and bars.

Make the most of these fine establishments by partaking in the quintessential Swedish ritual of 'fika' – a coffee and cake break dedicated to socialising with friends while enjoying the simple pleasures of food and drink. Alongside its sweet treats, Stockholm is awash with savoury

flavour thanks to ingredients from its nearby fields, forests and waters. Specialities range from classic Swedish meatballs and fried herring to more modern cuisine, including some of the best vegan food in the world and fantastic options for health-conscious diners.

Swedes also love their beer – craft ale aficionados will be right at home here, where cheaper pints are served after work, and micro-brewed beverages can be sipped in practically every bar you visit.

Museums in Stockholm demand to be seen. From the Vasa Museum (Vasamuseet), home of an ill-fated Swedish warship that's been masterfully reassembled, to Skansen, the world's first open-air museum that re-creates Sweden in miniature, these hubs of specialist knowledge are arguably the best way to gain an insight into Swedish culture during a short stay in the city. Pop fans won't want to miss ABBA The Museum, and on the other end of the cultural spectrum, Moderna Museet's collection of modern art is free to peruse.

Stockholm's Old Town on Gamla Stan is where the city was originally founded

### STOCKHOLM

#### Essential information

Stockholm is on its way to becoming a cash-free city, so take your bank card.

#### Best time to visit

*June to August*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITSTOCKHOLM.COM](http://WWW.VISITSTOCKHOLM.COM)

[WWW.SLOWTRAVELSTOCKHOLM.COM](http://WWW.SLOWTRAVELSTOCKHOLM.COM)

[WWW.STOCKHOLMTOURIST.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://WWW.STOCKHOLMTOURIST.BLOGSPOT.COM)





The Plaza de Cibeles, with its neo-classical marble statues and fountains, has become a symbol for the city of Madrid



## MADRID

### Essential information

Spain's metro is easy to use and navigate, so take advantage of it when travelling.

#### Best time to visit

*March to May for balmy weather*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.ESMADRID.COM/EN](http://WWW.ESMADRID.COM/EN)

[WWW.TURISMOMADRID.ES/EN](http://WWW.TURISMOMADRID.ES/EN)

[WWW.SPAIN.INFO/EN](http://WWW.SPAIN.INFO/EN)



©Getty/kasto80

# MADRID

## SPAIN'S CAPITAL IS CAPTIVATING THANKS TO ITS BROAD ARTISTIC SPECTRUM

Stepping out into the crowded streets of Madrid, you'll be amazed to see that the city is a rich tapestry of European art. One of the most prominent buildings in Madrid is its Royal Palace. While it no longer houses Spain's royal family, it is still their official residence. The building itself, one of 12 palaces in the region, was inspired by sketches made by the artist Bernini for Paris's most famous museum – the Louvre.

Inside the palace walls you will find an impressive armoury and painting gallery, featuring artistic gems from Luis de Morales, Juan de Flandes, Diego Velázquez and Joaquín Sorolla. Not far away the Liria Palace has recently opened its doors to the public. The palace's library is home to one of the first Spanish translations of the Old Testament and a collection of letters by Christopher Columbus.

The ultimate foodie experience in this city can be found at Sobrino de Botín. Found on Calle de Cuchilleros, this restaurant holds the title of the world's oldest restaurant according to the Guinness World Records. Opened in 1725, it still features a stunning 16th-century dining area. This little hideaway and its roast suckling pig was favoured by the literary godfather Ernest Hemingway (and mentioned in his book *The*

*Sun Also Rises*) during his travels around the peninsular. The artist Francisco Goya, considered to be Spain's most important artist throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, worked in the cafe as a waiter while waiting to get accepted into the Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

A short walk away is the beautiful Parque del Oeste and arguably its most fascinating monument – the Templo de Debod. The Egyptian structure, more than 2,200 years old, is dedicated to the gods Amon and Isis and was sent brick by brick as a thank you to Spain from the Egyptian government in 1968 for helping to preserve their monuments, which were being threatened by the rising reservoir of the Aswan Dam. Another fascinating thread to Madrid's rich tapestry is located in central Madrid: the Museo Nacional del Prado. This building is the Spanish national art museum, which houses stunning Spanish Romanesque murals and Gothic altarpieces, as well as classical and Renaissance sculptures.

On a sleepy Sunday morning, the area of Calle de la Ribera de Curtidores comes alive after 7am, when the street unfolds its five-centuries-old market, which offers a taste of the bustling Madrid unlike any other.



**ABOVE:** Formerly Casa Botín, the world's oldest restaurant, Sobrino de Botín was opened in 1725 and is famous for its suckling pig



Madrid's Gran Vía is the place to head if you're looking for some retail therapy

©Getty/Janat Pongphibool Thailand



Mountains set the scene in this culturally rich city, with plenty for adults and children to explore


**REYKJAVÍK**
**19**

## Essential information

Book a northern lights tour early in your trip, to allow for re-booking if needed.

### Best time to visit

*May to September (for more hours of daylight)*

### Time zone

UTC

### Useful sites

[WWW.GRAPEVINE.IS](http://WWW.GRAPEVINE.IS)

[WWW.ICELANDTRAVEL.IS](http://WWW.ICELANDTRAVEL.IS)

[WWW.LOCAL-ICELAND-TOURS.COM](http://WWW.LOCAL-ICELAND-TOURS.COM)



©Getty/patpongs

# REYKJAVÍK

## JOURNEY TO ICELAND'S CAPITAL TO EXPERIENCE BREATHTAKING SCENERY AND SPECTACULAR NATURAL WONDERS

Reykjavík is a city like no other. Backdropped by mountains and located along Iceland's south-western shoreline, embracing the constantly changing climate of the capital is all part and parcel of visiting one of the world's most exciting destinations.

The city is a cultural hub for those looking to get more familiar with Icelandic history, as well as its modern way of life. Featuring a wide array of museums to suit everybody's tastes, from The Settlement Exhibition, the Saga Museum and The National Gallery of Iceland, to the Whales of Iceland exhibition and the Reykjavík Museum of Photography, you're never without somewhere to visit on rainy days.

Divulge your taste buds in some of the best fish and chips at the Reykjavík Fish Restaurant along the harbour, or chomp on a fresh hot dog at the little Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur stall. If you're feeling adventurous, try out some of Iceland's more traditional delicacies, including fermented shark (hákarl), lamb soup (kjötsúpa) and dried fish (harðfiskur).

You can't visit Reykjavik without dipping your toes into a geothermal pool for instant relaxation and to soothe those sore muscles. The popular Blue Lagoon lies just a 50-minute drive away from the city centre, and will set you back around £70 (\$95) entry per person. Or, for a budget-friendly alternative, locate one of the city's public swimming complexes, for example Vesturbæjarlaug, to enjoy a variety of hot pools at various temperatures for a fee of just £6 (\$8) entry for adults.

Visit a Reykjavík Roasters café to slake your thirst for caffeine and enjoy expertly made coffee that will leave a lasting impression. Be wary, though, as shopping in Iceland comes with a hefty price tag. Sticking to a budget and looking for those deals where possible will make pennies stretch further. Use the AppyHour app to give you a list of all the pubs and restaurants that have deals running on drinks at any one time.

Treat Iceland's capital as a base to explore from, as most of the country's sights can be accessed through either organised tours or by hiring a

rental car. A couple of days is all that's required to explore the city's highlights before heading out into the wild to witness majestic glaciers, gigantic waterfalls and exploding geysers.

Take a day out to explore the Golden Circle; a round-up of some of Iceland's most spectacular natural wonders. Sights include the stunning Thingvellir National Park that, when visited during the snowy season, is truly a winter wonderland. Also featured on the tour is Gullfoss, a huge waterfall fed from a glacier that's visible in the background on a clear day.

A northern lights tour is a must for those visiting Iceland. A tour will typically last three to five hours. Don't forget to take your camera to capture the colourful natural wonder in all its glory, although buying photos from your tour organiser is sometimes an option.

The fact that the number of tourists who visit Iceland each year outweighs the country's actual population by six times over is evident of just how popular this island has become as a destination to not miss out on.



# BRIGHTON

DUBBED THE HAPPIEST CITY IN THE UK, BRIGHTON HAS SOMETHING TO PLEASE EVERYONE

Less than an hour away from London (via Victoria Station), the vibrant and eclectic city of Brighton is the perfect choice for those looking for an exciting day trip or a place to spend a few days relaxing by the shore.

At its best in the summer, when the skies are blue and the smell of vinegar-soaked fish and chips wafts through the air, Brighton Palace Pier is a staple stop-off for any Brighton visit. Beating wars and ferocious storms to stand tall for 120 years, the pier is both a historical point of interest and an entertainment hub. Spend the afternoon playing games at the arcade, thrill seeking in its dedicated fairground and gorging yourself on authentic British seaside fish and chips. Those interested in more of Brighton's historical offerings should also visit the world's oldest aquarium at SeaLife Brighton and the Royal Pavilion – an Indian-inspired seaside home built for the Prince of Wales in the 18th century.

After getting your fill of the seafront, head down to The Lanes, Brighton's famous maze of narrow alleyways home to a broad range of independent boutiques, jewellers, restaurants and more. Indulge your sweet tooth at Charlie's Sweet Emporium, while away the day reading obscure graphic novels or playing board games at the cosy Dave's Comics, enjoy afternoon tea at That Little Tea Shop in The Lanes, or browse through the impressive collection of samurai swords and other antique weaponry at The Lanes Armoury. For some more shopping, make your way to North Laine, where you'll find Oliver's (a haven for Harry Potter fans), the eco-friendly Vegetarian Shoes, and Snoopers Paradise, a thrifter's dreamland.

When it comes to food, there's no shortage of excellent eateries to try out. Head over to one of Brighton's oldest pubs, the charming Lion and Lobster, and enjoy a traditional British dinner made from ingredients sourced locally. Then there's the lively Proud Cabaret where you can enjoy cabaret, burlesque and drag shows while eating its delicious seasonal menu.

As the Sun sets, stroll around the small city and admire the colourful and unique street art and murals that decorate it, including Banksy's *Kissing Policemen* (a replica of the original), the Prince Albert pub's music mural (where you'll find paintings of Aretha Franklin, Elvis and Prince to name just a few), rubbish bins painted in homage to the *Star Wars* series and much more.

**"HEAD TO THE LANES,  
BRIGHTON'S MAZE OF  
NARROW ALLEYWAYS"**



**BRIGHTON**

## Essential information

Avoid public transport and walk or rent a bike to explore the small city.

### Best time to visit

*May to September for  
the clearest skies and  
best temperatures*

### Time zone

UTC

### Useful sites

[VISITSEALIFE.COM/BRIGHTON](http://VISITSEALIFE.COM/BRIGHTON)

[BTNBKESHARE.COM](http://BTNBKESHARE.COM)

[WWW.VISITBRIGHTON.COM](http://WWW.VISITBRIGHTON.COM)





# AMSTERDAM

UNCOVER THIS BEAUTIFUL CANAL CITY IN THE HEART OF THE NETHERLANDS

As you disembark the train at Amsterdam Centraal and make your way to the front of the beautiful 19th-century building, there's a whole city full of history and culture waiting to be explored. Perhaps you've got a week, or maybe just a short break, it doesn't matter – there's more than enough to keep you occupied. The most difficult decision you'll have is where to go first.

It's probably important to get the lay of the land first, and while a map can be great for this, there's a better option. Once you've left Amsterdam Centraal, head left and take a walk along Stationsplein and then Oosterdoksade until you come across Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam. While this is the city library, there's a restaurant on the top floor with a balcony that provides stunning views of Amsterdam on a clear day, with a handy map of the skyline. You'll be able to spot both Oude Kerk and Nieuwe Kerk (churches), and admire the traditional Dutch gable houses that make Amsterdam so iconic.

The first tourist destination most people head to is Dam Square, and there's a reason for that. While it has a Madame Tussauds on one side, it's also home to the Nationaal Monument and, perhaps more excitingly, Amsterdam's royal palace, Koninklijk Paleis. Entrance to the palace is only about £8.60 (\$11) for adults, and it's a chance to take a walk through the Netherlands' rich royal history. Dam Square is also near to the Red Light District, which highlights the liberal culture of the city and is certainly worth a visit.

But Amsterdam's past isn't only known for its royalty – the city used to be home to artists aplenty, and a trip to Museumplein (Museum Square) is a must for any art or art-history lover. Dominating the area is the Rijksmuseum, a Dutch national museum that houses works created by Rembrandt and Vermeer, among others. Of course, a quick stroll past the water feature (which incidentally is perfect to dip your feet into on a hot day) will find you at the Van Gogh Museum, which holds the largest collection of Van Gogh paintings in the world. However, if modern art is more your style, then take a trip to the nearby Stedelijk Museum.

Of course, Amsterdam also has a darker history, and the person probably most famously associated with it is Anne Frank. The youngest in a Jewish family, she, her sister and her parents fled Nazi Berlin for Amsterdam. When the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, they went into hiding in an attic on Prinsengracht, but they were



You'll find cheese shops all over the city, and many offer free samples

The Anne Frank House can have long queues, so it's worth booking your slot ahead of time



©Getty/Sjo

betrayed a few years later. After being sent to concentration camps, only Anne's father, Otto, survived. The attic is now open to the public, and walking through the concealed entrance to the hiding space is a harrowing experience. The floorboards creak underfoot – it's hard to imagine how still the family and their fellow fugitives had to stay to avoid detection.

There's more to Amsterdam than its history. The lifeblood that flows through the city are the canals, arranged in an ever-expanding horseshoe. There are plenty of companies running boat tours up and down the canals, and it's a great opportunity to see some of the beautiful Dutch architecture, as well as scope out where you want to go next. But connecting all the canals is the Amstel, the river after which the beer is named. If you're after a little of the beverage, head over to the Heineken Experience on Stadhouderskade for a tour of the brewery and a tasting at the end.

One thing you'll spot a lot of are the cheese shops – it seems like they're on every corner. If you want a gift to take home to family and friends, this is perfect. Inside you'll find brightly wrapped Dutch cheeses that are smoked, infused with pesto and more. You'll also be able to buy your stroopwafels here – caramel waffles that go very well with a good cup of coffee.

That brings us to food. You'll find every type of cuisine imaginable here – it's a city, after all – but

**"ADMIRE THE DUTCH GABLE HOUSES THAT MAKE AMSTERDAM SO ICONIC"**



Be sure to jump on a bike to see the real Amsterdam

©Getty/JJHV



# TRAVELLING IN AMSTERDAM

Transport is the first thing you might worry about it, especially if your accommodation seems like a long trek away after being on a train or plane. Amsterdam has taken the stress out of travel, though; you just need to hop over the road to the tourist information office to get yourself a travel card that will give you unlimited travel for one, two or three days, costing around £15 (\$20), £20 (\$25) and £25 (\$31) respectively. The trams are so easy to navigate – there are stops all over the city and out into the suburbs – and your ticket will also allow you unlimited use of the metro while it's valid, too. However, if you want to travel like a local, you'll find bikes to rent all over the city.

Trams run all over the city centre



There is so much to do in this bustling city – you won't get bored!

it can be good to stray a little from the centre of the city where things are geared more towards tourists. Out in the suburbs you can eat like a local, although central Amsterdam will still be good for your crêpes, fries and bagels.

If you're eating on the go, or you'd just like a break from the hustle and bustle of the city, Amsterdam is more than ready to provide. Dotted around the city you'll find glorious parks, each offering a slice of peace. The most famous is probably Vondelpark, in the southeast, and it has some beautiful small lakes. You may even stumble upon a free concert in the spring or summer months. Elsewhere, there's Rembrandtpark (near Rembrandtplein),

Westerpark, Amstelpark and Oosterpark, as well as ARTIS, Amsterdam's zoo.

If you somehow run out of things to do in Amsterdam, there's no need to worry – the city is well connected, and you can jump on a train and head all over the country. The Hague is only half an hour or so away, along with Rotterdam, Dordrecht and Utrecht. You can also head over the border and into Germany or Belgium, which can come in handy if you're wanting to embark on a tour of Europe. But Amsterdam is a beautiful city, and there's so much to do there that filling your holiday shouldn't be all that difficult. With culture, history and food aplenty, you're bound to leave feeling like you're flying high.

Amsterdam is known for its architecture and beautiful canals



## AMSTERDAM

### Essential information

Be careful when walking in Amsterdam – bikes can appear in front of you out of nowhere!

#### Best time to visit

*All year round*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.IAMSTERDAM.COM/EN](http://WWW.IAMSTERDAM.COM/EN)

[WWW.AMSTERDAMPASS.COM](http://WWW.AMSTERDAMPASS.COM)

[WWW.EN.GVB.NL/AMSTERDAM-TRAVEL-TICKET](http://WWW.EN.GVB.NL/AMSTERDAM-TRAVEL-TICKET)





This bustling region offers tourists the best of both lively city life and sedentary beaches

## NICE

### Essential information

Make the most of Nice's cycle share scheme, Vélo Bleu – it's a hassle to set up, but makes getting around the city quick, easy and cheap.

#### Best time to visit

*March to October*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.FRANCE.FR/EN/COTE-DAZUR](http://WWW.FRANCE.FR/EN/COTE-DAZUR)

[EN.NICETOURISME.COM](http://EN.NICETOURISME.COM)

[WWW.FRENCHRIVIERA-TOURISM.COM](http://WWW.FRENCHRIVIERA-TOURISM.COM)



©Getty/bbsferrari

# NICE

## THIS METROPOLIS ON THE WORLD-FAMOUS FRENCH RIVIERA OFFERS VISITORS THE BEST OF BOTH CITY LIFE AND BEACH RETREATS

There are few places in the world as spectacular as the Côte d'Azur – the imposing Alpine mountains descend gracefully into fields of lavender and village-topped hills, eventually meeting the Mediterranean coastline. Here, along the southern shores of France, looms the city of Nice. It's one of the most popular holiday destinations, not least because it has absolutely everything to offer visitors, from luxurious beach retreats to a vibrant nightlife.

With its glorious coastline, thriving city and bustling Old Town, Nice is an essential port of call for any trip to the Riviera. As a city, Nice proves that life along the Med goes on as normal – but with that charmingly laid-back French attitude. Where Parisians sit in cafes and watch the world go by, the Niçois head down to the promenade, enjoying the slower pace of life. To really experience the Riviera lifestyle, be sure to take the time to sit and relax on or by the beach, watching the waves as they tumble towards you.

Like many of France's cities, Nice is a twisting maze of quaint streets, but with a Mediterranean slant. For panoramic views over the famous red-tiled roofs, take a leisurely walk up to Castle Hill. If you'd rather stay in the shade, why not take a wander around Nice's Old Town? The historic

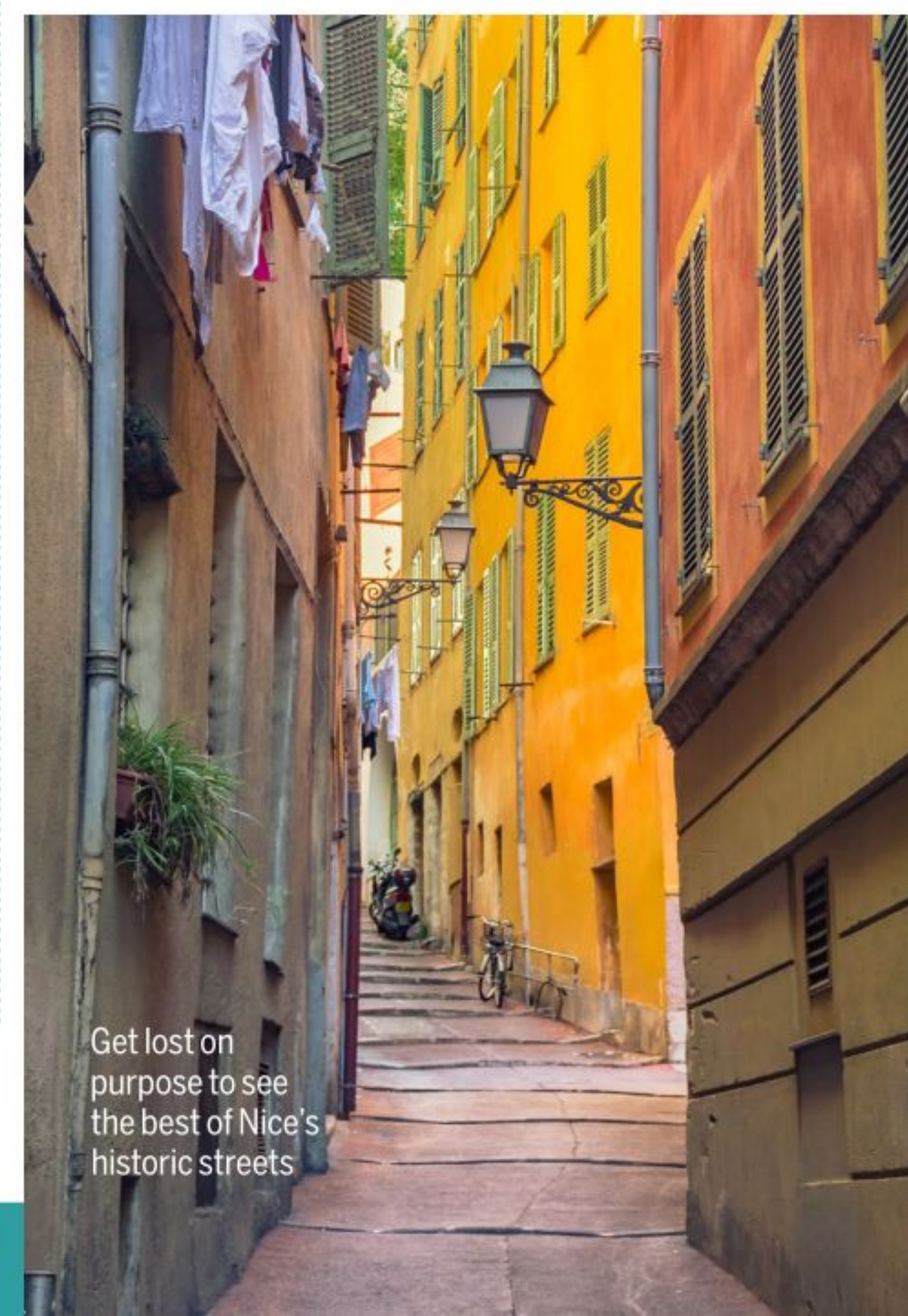
quarter is peppered with charming cafes and restaurants, as well as a wealth of spectacular markets to browse. Except for Mondays, the markets run every day – head down to Cours Saleya for an authentic experience, and pick yourself up some quintessentially Niçois produce.

If you're more interested in visiting the city's museums, it's worth popping into the Musée Matisse. Having made his home in the region, Matisse's legacy is hugely celebrated by the area, and the museum holds one of the largest collections of his work. Round the corner from the museum is a serene monastery dating back to the 800s CE, with a spectacular garden.

One other aspect of Niçois life that never fails to excite is the region's cuisine. While the south of France is no stranger to traditional French cooking, it has its own take on food, mixing classic cuisine with Mediterranean charm. Perhaps the most famous French-Mediterranean hybrid is socca, a chickpea pancake. Usually served plain or with savoury garnishes, socca is the highlight of Riviera cuisine. Cheap, quick to eat and delicious, it's the perfect light lunch for anyone intending to spend the day relaxing on the beaches.

The south of France's public transport system is excellent, with buses running across the

entire coastline, as well as up into the hills and further inland. Likewise, the region is served by a regular train service – trains to the bigger stops run every 20 minutes and cost very little. Nice is the perfect base for day-tripping further into the region – be sure to visit Èze, a charming medieval hilltop town with panoramic views over the entire coast, or experience another world entirely in Monaco.



Get lost on purpose to see the best of Nice's historic streets

©Getty/SvetlanaSF



# EDINBURGH

THE PICTURESQUE CAPITAL CITY HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE – FROM HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS TO THRIVING FESTIVALS

Arguably the best city in Scotland, this beautiful capital is absolutely steeped in history. The iconic Edinburgh Castle sits in pride of place in the middle of the city centre on top of an extinct volcano – completely dominating the skyline. You have to visit the castle on the rock, even if only to recognise the pivotal role that it played in Scottish history. In 1058, it became a royal residence and a military stronghold for King Malcolm Canmore and later Queen Elizabeth. The castle today is one of Scotland's most popular and atmospheric tourist attractions. In August, book tickets for the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, which takes place on the castle's esplanade.

Explore the city's spooky past by embarking on an adventure underground to the city beneath the city, and delve into 400 years of history at the Real Mary King's Close. During the day, enjoy a historical tour about the close and warren of streets, homes and passageways and unlock the secrets of Edinburgh's buried past. Learn the

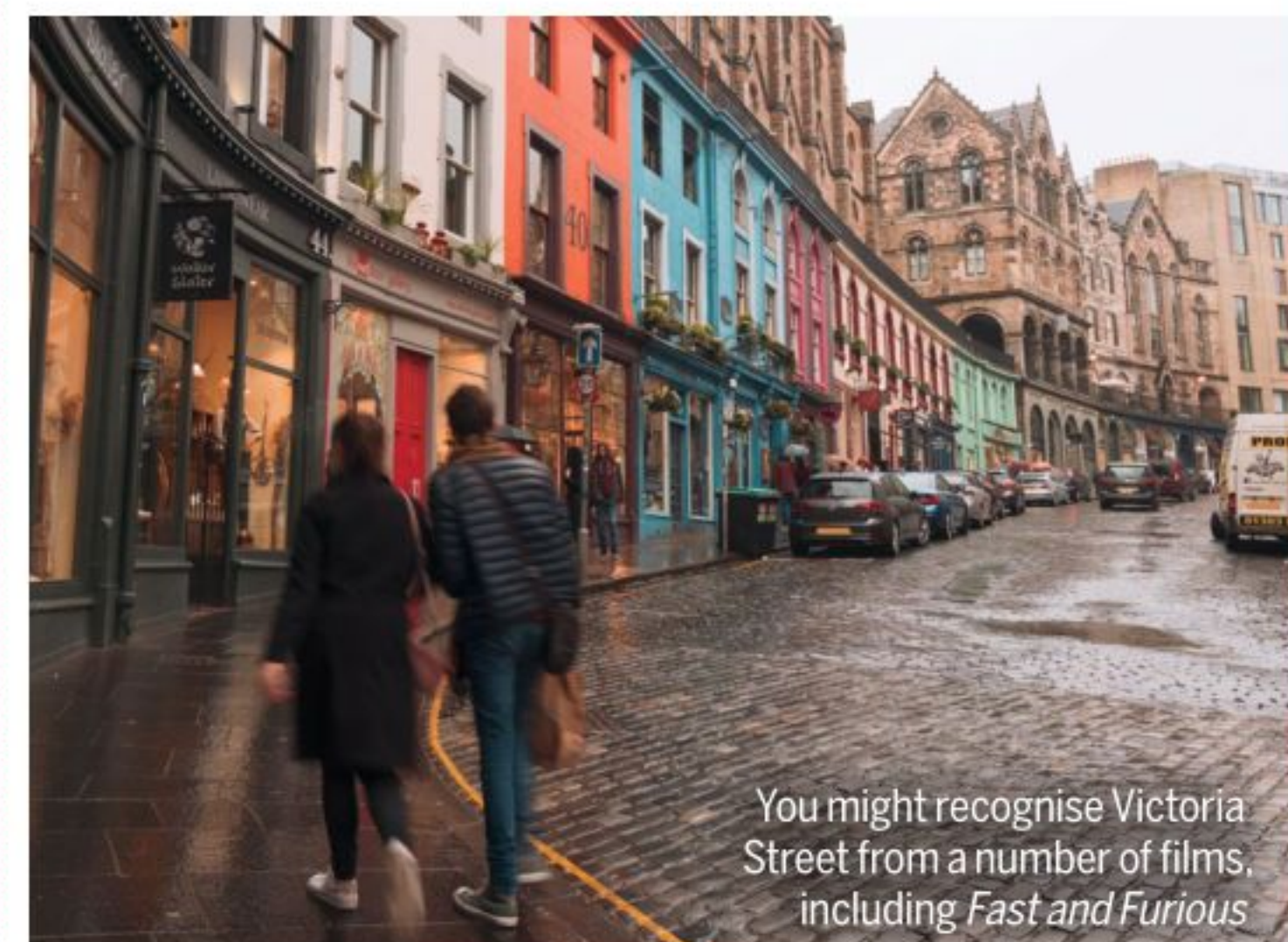
eerie myths and stories about those who lived in the city and tall tenement buildings, visit the butcher's shop and find out about the plague that swept across the city. Or if you are brave enough, take the late-night Tales of Witchcraft and Misadventure tour for a darker and more dramatic look at Edinburgh's volatile past.

During the month of August, Edinburgh transforms into a hub of culture, comedy and fun. Experiencing Edinburgh during the festival is a must for everyone – the Edinburgh International Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival run alongside each other. The Old Town fills with street performers, comedy shows, arts and theatre, and the bars stay open later. The city thrives during August and welcomes tourists from all over the world with open arms.

To get an unusual and unique view of the city, visit Camera Obscura, or learn about how life on Earth evolved at Dynamic Earth. If you're brave enough, climb the 288 stairs up to the Scott Monument for an impressive view of Princes

Street, the gardens, the Old Town and the castle, or head to Edinburgh Zoo, which is home to the only knighted penguin in the world, Sir Nils Olav, as well as two giant pandas, which both make the zoo worth visiting.

You can't visit the capital without going into one of the many tartan shops and trying on a kilt or a pair of trews, or finding a whiskey shop and sampling one of the delicious malts that Scotland has to offer. If whiskey isn't your thing, try the Edinburgh Gin Distillery for a taste of the multi-award-winning small-batch spirit.



You might recognise Victoria Street from a number of films, including *Fast and Furious*

**“THE CITY THRIVES DURING AUGUST AND WELCOMES VISITORS WITH OPEN ARMS”**

The majestic Edinburgh Castle dominates the city's skyline



**EDINBURGH**

## Essential information

Buses now accept contactless payment, for stress-free travel around the city.

### Best time to visit

*August for the festival*

### Time zone

UTC

### Useful sites

[WWW.EDINBURGH.ORG](http://WWW.EDINBURGH.ORG)

[WWW.VISITSCOTLAND.COM](http://WWW.VISITSCOTLAND.COM)

[WWW.REALMARYKINGSCLOSE.COM](http://WWW.REALMARYKINGSCLOSE.COM)





The city of Munich has something to offer everyone, from museums and galleries to beer halls and BMWs


**MUNICH**
**24**

## Essential information

Consider reserving a table if you're visiting during Oktoberfest. It gets very busy and tables fill up fast.

### Best time to visit

*September to October (to experience Oktoberfest)*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.OKTOBERFEST.DE](http://WWW.OKTOBERFEST.DE)

[WWW.MUENCHEN.DE](http://WWW.MUENCHEN.DE)

[WWW.HOFBRAEUHAUS.DE](http://WWW.HOFBRAEUHAUS.DE)

CURRENCY  
€  
EURO

# MUNICH

## BAVARIAN CUSTOMS AND MODERN CULTURE COLLIDE IN A CITY THAT BOASTS TRADITIONAL BREWERIES, CONTEMPORARY ART AND A FAMOUS FESTIVAL

There's far more to Munich than the lederhosen, dirndl and beer associated with traditional Bavarian culture, but that doesn't mean you should deprive yourself of the pleasure of embracing Munich's traditional side.

Munich's Altstadt, or Old Town, is a great place to start. Here you'll find the city's famous square, Marienplatz. Named after the 'Mariensäule', a column erected in the square's centre to celebrate the end of Swedish occupation in 1638, the square is a must-see for the stunning architecture that surrounds its four sides, most notably its 'new' and 'old' town halls, whose histories date back to 1889 and 1310 respectively.

Wherever you go in Munich, you'll never be far from a brewery, a traditional 'Wirsthäuser' restaurant or a beer garden, key features of Munich's culture of food and drink. Nevertheless, it's worth making a pilgrimage to one of the oldest beer houses in the city: the famous Hofbräuhaus, founded as a brewery in 1589 by Wilhelm V, the Duke of Bavaria. The hall is a mere five-minute walk from Marienplatz, and offers an authentic experience of traditional

beer-hall culture. Just ask one of the many regulars whose personal beer mugs are stored in safes at the beer hall!

Of course, if Munich's beer culture is top of your priority list, you'll want to visit during the world-famous Oktoberfest, which attracts more than six million visitors every year. As well as quenching your thirst with stein-fulls of quality German beer, you can enjoy rides, games, stalls and hearty traditional Bavarian cuisine. If you're not a beer fan, consider visiting in the lead up to Christmas instead to experience the city's beautiful Christmas market.

With all this focus on tradition, let us not forget that Munich is a modern, dynamic city too. Head to the Kunstareal, where you can see works from Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst, among others, at the striking Brandhorst Museum, and visit Germany's biggest modern-art museum, the Pinakothek der Moderne. Also in the area are the Alte Pinakothek, featuring art from between the 14th and 18th centuries, and the Neue Pinakothek, featuring paintings and sculptures from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

For car lovers, a trip over to BMW World is absolutely essential. It has a showroom with the latest BMW cars and motorcycles, a museum, and the option to take a guided tour. It also has the bonus of being located next to Munich's Olympic Park, constructed for the 1972 Summer Olympics. Today it is a cultural and social hub, where you are able to take in a concert, go ice skating, do some shopping, or simply take a stroll.

**BELOW:** Visiting Munich's world-famous Oktoberfest is a bucket-list experience for many travellers

©Getty/wundervisuals





# BILBAO

SET YOUR SAT NAV TO BILBAO, AND EXPERIENCE NORTHERN SPAIN'S BEAUTIFUL AND SCENIC BASQUE COUNTRY BEFORE SETTING FOOT IN A CITY OF ART AND CULTURE

**N**amed European City of the Year 2018, Bilbao is a city of development and change, transforming itself from an industrial port city exporting ironworks, to a modern, artistic and lively hub serving as a tourist hotspot for those looking to sample the very best of the Basque Country.

Take one look at the Guggenheim Museum and you'll be bearing witness to how, in the '90s, Bilbao's tourism changed forever. The museum of modern and contemporary art has helped put Bilbao back on the global map, featuring art from the 20th century to modern day, inside an incredible building that stands out more than any other building in the city.

The medieval Casco Viejo, also known as Seven Streets because of its parallel roads, forms the Old Quarter. Once fortified until the 19th century, the many attractions found here make this one of the most visited parts of Bilbao. Sights

include the grand Santiago Cathedral, displaying a mix of architectural styles, from its Gothic spire to the 15th-century cloister and main vault. While visiting Casco Viejo, don't miss the opportunity to photograph the beautiful Teatro Arriaga, a venue for performing arts and concerts.

Semana Grande, or Aste Nagusia, is a nine-day-long festival held each year in August. It is an important event in Bilbao's calendar, and celebrates the Basque culture while honouring the Virgen de Begoña. Across the event, celebrate in one of the many street concerts, firework displays, parades, food fights and even bullfighting. With more than 100,000 people attending the event, there's no better way to get stuck into the Basque culture.

Your journey to Bilbao should include a stop at the Santander train station. With an art nouveau design and situated along the estuary, this is an ideal spot to sit and take it all in with a sample of scrummy Basque cider. And you can't visit Bilbao without sampling the local speciality, pintxos. These little tapas-style snacks form the backbone of Basque cuisine, and there are plenty of places to grab a bite while exploring the city's alleyways and hidden streets. Take a stroll over the Zubizuri footbridge, cross the Nervión river and walk southwards to where you can find the Teatro Arriaga opera house. Bilbao's continued development and creativity will forever change the future of this hidden European gem.

**"SIT AND TAKE IT ALL IN WITH A SAMPLE OF SCRUMMY BASQUE CIDER"**

The famous Guggenheim Museum is an architectural marvel, drawing in the crowds to the world of contemporary art

 **BILBAO**

## Essential information

Siesta happens at around 2pm, with shops closing then reopening three to four hours later.

### Best time to visit

*June to September*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.BILBAOTURISMO.NET](http://WWW.BILBAOTURISMO.NET)

[WWW.GUGGENHEIM-BILBAO.EUS/EN](http://WWW.GUGGENHEIM-BILBAO.EUS/EN)

[WWW.EUSKOGUIDE.COM](http://WWW.EUSKOGUIDE.COM)





# PARIS

A MECCA FOR ARTISTS AND ROMANTICS, FRANCE'S CAPITAL HAS PLENTY OF GEMS WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED

With its reputation as the 'City of Love', Paris certainly has a lot to live up to – but in this sprawling city made up of winding streets and lookalike buildings, it's easy to find yourself stumbling into Paris's most romantic quarters.

Of all of Paris's districts, however, there's no arrondissement quite as spectacular and mesmerising as Montmartre. A suburb built up on the city's steepest hill, Montmartre thrived in the late 19th century as a creative hub, a mecca for all of Europe's greatest artists, including Picasso, Dalí, Van Gogh and Degas. With its cobbled streets, unspoilt vibe and wealth of independent shops and stalls, Montmartre is the living memory of the celebrated Belle Époque, a golden age of French history immortalised in film and literature.

To truly absorb the beauty of Montmartre, it's a good idea to spend a full day – and night – out and about. Visit one of the many crêperies that flank street corners for a chocolatey treat, then allow your feet to take you around town. Any trip to Montmartre isn't worth doing unless you visit the Basilica de Sacré-Coeur, where you'll be granted incredible panoramic views over the city. From here, walk around to the square at the back

of the church, where you'll find yourself being hustled and charmed by local artists selling their wares. If you're feeling brave, pose for one of the market's infamous caricaturists!

If you'd rather soak up the art, there are several key locations to visit within minutes of the square – the local Dalí Paris show exhibits some of the kooky artist's key pieces, including one of his *Lobster Telephones*. Theodor van Gogh, brother and patron of the celebrated Vincent van Gogh, lived on Rue Lepic, one of the small streets leading down from the Sacré-Coeur, where his brother lived with him from 1886 to 1888. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, another of Van Gogh's close acquaintances, also lived around the corner from the Van Gogh brothers.

Indeed, Montmartre is home to many Parisian institutions, including the infamous Moulin Rouge on one of the main roads through the arrondissement. Despite its less-than-convenient location, tourists flock to this iconic red windmill, keen to capture a photo. The cabaret itself still ranks as one of the best in Paris despite its fame. If you'd rather skip the crowd, however, head across town to Le Zèbre de Belleville for a more intimate, traditional experience.

While Montmartre might embody most people's expectations of Paris, the city has so much more to offer in its other arrondissements. Belleville, one of Paris's most diverse suburbs, is renowned for being among the coolest places in the city. Here, take a tour of the local graffiti art on Rue Dénoyez. Nearby is also the famed Père Lachaise cemetery, the final resting place of Oscar Wilde, Edith Piaf and Jim Morrison, among others. An unlikely destination on many tourists' itineraries, the cemetery is nevertheless a popular site and well worth a visit away from the hubbub of the general city.

Not that Paris is overwhelmed or overworked. In fact, Paris is unlike many of the world's capital cities in that its inhabitants take a very different view on life. Where Londoners or New Yorkers rush around, a week's worth of work to be done in a day, Parisians have embraced a rather different approach to living. Life is to be savoured and enjoyed; health and happiness come first. To visit Paris and to hurry around is very un-Parisian – why not take a tip from the locals? The city is filled with brasseries and cafés, restaurants and bars, so make the most of it. Most arrondissements have their own vibe; once you've found a place you like, sit down, sip

## PARIS

### Essential information

For a quick way to whizz through all Paris has to offer, hire an electric scooter for around £13 (\$17) an hour.

#### Best time to visit

*All year round*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.EN.PARISINFO.COM](http://WWW.EN.PARISINFO.COM)  
[WWW.FRANCE.FR/EN/PARIS](http://WWW.FRANCE.FR/EN/PARIS)  
[WWW.APARISGUIDE.COM](http://WWW.APARISGUIDE.COM)

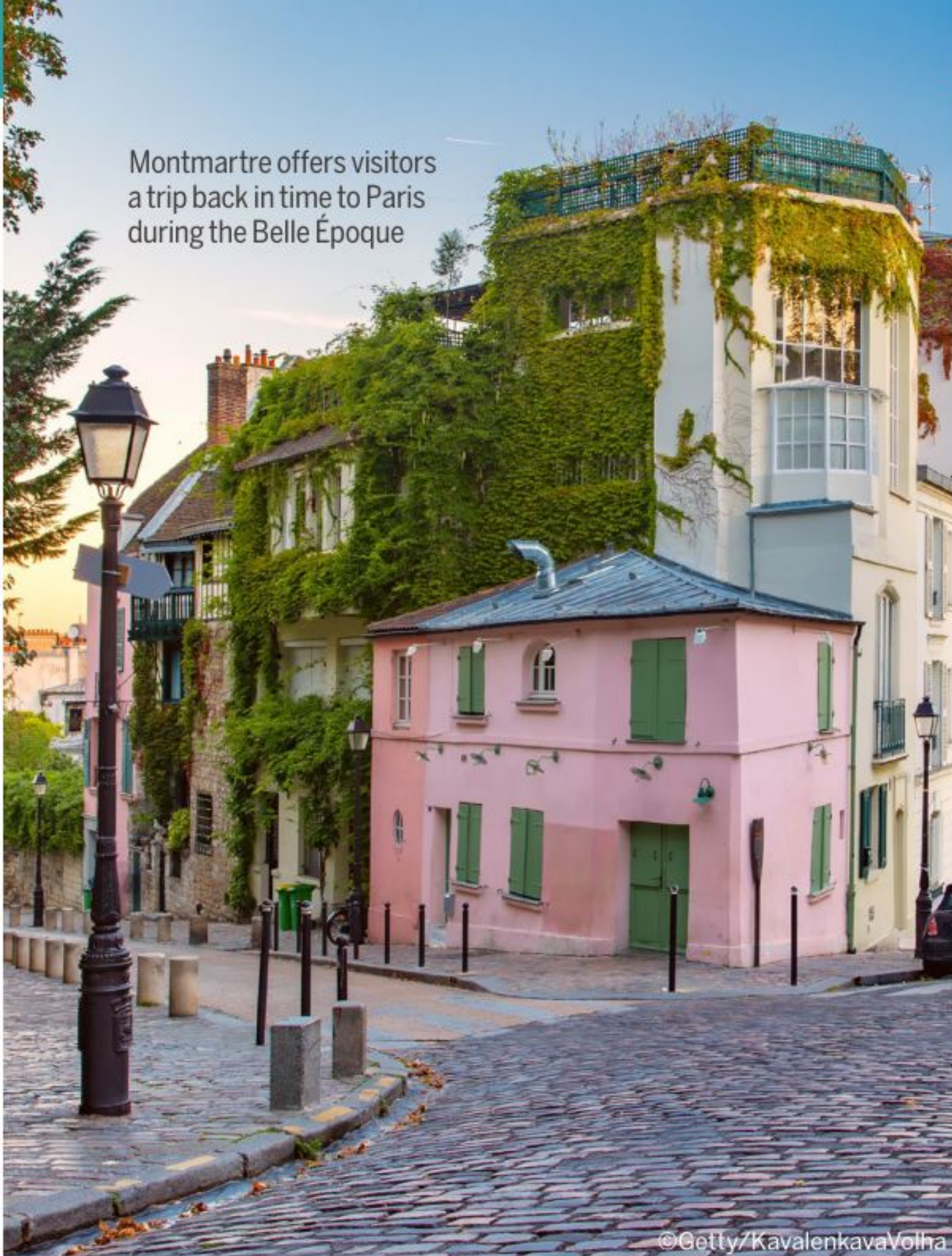


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The iconic Eiffel Tower dominates the skyline around the city



Montmartre offers visitors a trip back in time to Paris during the Belle Époque



©Getty/KavalenkavaVolha



Enjoy the city on foot to see the best of what it has to offer

©Getty/manjik

Europe

## “LIFE IS TO BE SAVOURED AND ENJOYED; HEALTH AND HAPPINESS COME FIRST”

on a glass of wine and watch the world go by. Worthwhile visits include La Fée Verte in the 11th arrondissement, an absinthe bar inspired by the Belle Époque. For film buffs, the café featured in the film *Amélie* is down the road from Van Gogh's residence on Rue Lepic.

While Paris has long been hailed as the home of bohemian artists, there is another equally prodigious kind of person who considers the city an essential port of call. Any chef worth his salt has done a stint in France's capital, earning their stripes in the home of the world's greatest cuisine. Paris has been the make-or-break for many leading chefs, so naturally it's one of the greatest places in Europe to eat out.

While the city does have its fair share of fancy restaurants, excellent food and experimental cooking is available if you know where to look. Don't be tempted to visit the restaurants that line the key tourist spots – while the sight of visitors dining on mussels and sipping wine at their table might tempt you, often the better restaurants are tucked away off the beaten track. If you're visiting Paris during the week, you'll find that many of the city's restaurants offer cheaper lunch menus, or in the evening there will likely be a fixed menu for a reasonable cost. As well as eating out in Paris, be sure to enjoy the incredible wine on offer. Because France produces plenty of the world's wine, from Bordeaux to Merlot, you'll find that the cost of wine is much cheaper than anywhere else on the planet.

No trip to Paris is complete without soaking up the great art – pencil in a whole day to visit the Musée du Louvre. Built on the site of the old Louvre Castle, which was once residence for the French royals, the Louvre is a beautiful mix of old and new, with its glorious palatial complex contrasted by the glass pyramids in the museum's square. Inside the museum is equally

spectacular, featuring some of the world's most celebrated artworks including the *Mona Lisa*, *Venus de Milo* and the celebrated *Liberty Leading the People*.

Another iconic Parisian institution that cannot be missed is the Eiffel Tower. Queues form quickly for this attraction, so head over as early as possible to get through security, and ascend before the crowds. With tickets costing about £22 (\$28) to travel the 276 metres (906 feet) to the top, it's not the cheapest visit, but the view from the summit is worth it on a clear day. To make the most of your ticket, visit the exhibits, as well as the champagne bar at the top, or take in the views at the second-floor's restaurant.



©Getty/vichie81

Art lovers can't miss a visit to the Louvre



Visit plenty of Paris's best sites, including the breathtaking Sainte-Chapelle, for free on the first Sunday of every month

©Getty/Marek Subirats

## FREE MUSEUM OPENINGS

With so many incredible sites, galleries and museums to visit, Paris can quickly become an expensive place for tourists hoping to soak up the city's history and culture. However, the first Sunday of every month sees most museums open their doors for free. If you're lucky enough to be in town on this date, be sure to get up early to beat the crowds, as queues are quick to form at the more popular destinations. To make the most of the day, plan an itinerary, using the internet to find out how much time you're likely to spend at different sites. While you can lose yourself for hours in most of Paris's galleries, you may find that half an hour will suffice at other sites. It's worth checking online to find out which museums are part of the Sunday scheme – not all museums participate, and some that do will charge entry at peak summer season.



 **VENICE**
**Essential information**

The city is always incredibly busy in late spring and early summer, so try to avoid these months.

**Best time to visit**

*All year round (the city is less busy in winter, but it is cooler)*

**Time zone**

UTC+1

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VENEZIAUNICA.IT/EN](http://WWW.VENEZIAUNICA.IT/EN)  
[WWW.VENICE-MUSEUM.COM](http://WWW.VENICE-MUSEUM.COM)  
[VENEZIAAUTENTICA.COM](http://VENEZIAAUTENTICA.COM)

CURRENCY  
€  
EURO

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# VENICE

## EXPLORE ITALY'S CITY OF WATER AND ITS VIBRANT HISTORY

The city of Venice isn't just steeped in history – its past flows through its famous canals and can be seen in every crevice of the city's magnificent architecture. If you're looking for a cultural trip with a Renaissance vibe, you needn't look any further. But don't be fooled into forcing Venice into this corner because it has so much more to offer you.

In the 18th century, Venice was a party city and in some ways it still is – especially if you visit in the run-up to Lent. At that time of year, Venice really lets its hair down and goes all out in Carnevale. An already-vibrant Venice comes alive as the streets are filled with people in elaborate costumes and masks in an open-air festival that spans the entire city. You'll find live music in the squares, balls and parties to attend, and an endless list of sights to see.

For those looking for something a little quieter, it's important to remember that Venice is an

incredibly busy tourist city thanks to its stunning buildings and lively history, but as long as Carnevale isn't on, you should be okay. When the streets aren't full of mask-wearing revellers, you'll find it a lot easier to check out the other attractions Venice offers you.

It's the gondolas that are most associated with the city. You'd regret it if you flew all that way and missed out on the classic experience of riding through Venice's canals via the traditional method. You can book tours of the city from the water or you can simply go for a ride, but it's best to stay away from the Grand Canal as it can get incredibly busy. It is a must-do experience, though, as there is no other way to appreciate how to get around in the Floating City.

For some good Gothic architecture, the Doge's Palace is where you'll want to head next. Built in 1424, it was one of the city's most important buildings, and it reopened as a museum in 1923.

During the Venetian Republic, this was where the ruler would live, spending his/her days in opulent apartments and stunning halls. The palace also has chambers from when the city was administrated from there, and a prison, connected by the famous Bridge of Sighs. For more splendour, check out Saint Mark's Basilica near the Doge's Palace. While the outside is simply stunning, inside really is something to behold. Over 8,000 square metres (86,000 square feet) of mosaics cover the walls, vaults and copulas, telling different stories from the *Bible* with glittering gold backgrounds.

But Venice has more than history. A little-known fact is that Venice is the capital of the Veneto region: the home of Prosecco. With tiny wine bars all through the city, it's impossible to go for a drink and not see it on the menu. It's the perfect excuse to try the different flavours as you sit overlooking the canals on a summer day.



# OSLO

## EXPLORE THIS NORTHERN CAPITAL'S MASTERY OF BOTH NATURAL BEAUTY AND ARCHITECTURAL GRANDEUR

Whether you're testing your resolve in its harsh winters or prefer to make the most of the Norwegian capital while the Sun still shines, Oslo is a city that's ready and able to provide whatever the weather. While many may travel looking for a blanket of the white stuff to hurl themselves down a mountain, Oslo is just as suitable for summer trips, too. You may want to take a boat trip out on the fjords, for example, and the chance to glimpse a dolphin cresting the surface is likely not worth combating the bitter winds in winter.

In fact, you'll be thankful for Norway's long summer days – where the Sun doesn't really set until midnight – because when it comes to exploring Oslo's natural environments, there's just too much to fit in. Neighbouring hikes, island hopping across the fjord, meandering the Akerselva river that cuts through the city; Norway's serene natural environment takes centre stage in Oslo. The open-air museum at Ekebergparken is particularly compelling in the warmer months, with numerous sculptures dotted across the hilltop that overlooks the fjord below. And if it's sculptures you're looking for, Oslo is home to the world's largest sculpture park in Frogner Park, and the Vigeland installation within, with more than 200 intricate bronze and granite statues created by Gustav Vigeland.

But don't overlook Oslo when it dons its winter gown, either. Not only do the colder temperatures – which are still mild by inland Norwegian standards – mean that the streets aren't quite as crammed with tourists, but there's a delicate beauty to the city when it's coated in a layer of the white stuff. The varied and eclectic contemporary architecture of Oslo is certainly one of the major reasons to explore the city, but it's hard not to be captivated when those straight edges of steel and glass are softened by snow. The renovated docklands of Sørenga is the prime spot for this, offering panoramic views of the Oslo skyline, waterside restaurants and a pleasant stroll past the Opera House – the most prominent example of modern architecture in the city.

Oslo doesn't close up shop in the winter, either. Numerous ice rinks appear throughout the city, the huge ski jump and museum at Holmenkollen becomes a worthwhile destination, and a nearby sledding track all make for unique activities that many other cities can't provide. If you're feeling really brave, you could even test your resolve against the Scandinavians and try hopping directly from a sauna into the icy cold waters surrounding the city. While Oslo may be able to cater for the warmth, the mark it'll leave if you visit in the winter will be indelible.

 **OSLO**

### Essential information

Oslo can be expensive, but there are lots of free events and attractions available.

### Best time to visit

*June to July (for the mild weather and midnight sun) or winter (for lower room rates and winter activities)*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.OSLO.COM](http://WWW.OSLO.COM)

[WWW.VISITNORWAY.COM/PLACES-TO-GO/EASTERN-NORWAY/OSLO](http://WWW.VISITNORWAY.COM/PLACES-TO-GO/EASTERN-NORWAY/OSLO)

[WWW.SALTED.NO/SAUNA](http://WWW.SALTED.NO/SAUNA)



**ABOVE:** Touring the islands on Oslofjord is a pleasant day trip, but you likely wouldn't want to face it on a winter's day

Akershus Fortress is a medieval castle that's been used as a military base and prison in the past





Porto's colourful Old Town lines the city's Douro River

## PORTO

### Essential information

Port's EU-protected status means only Douro Valley wine can be called Port – so stock up!

#### Best time to visit

*June for weather and festivals*

#### Time zone

UTC



#### Useful sites

[WWW.DISCOVEROPORTO.COM/EN](http://WWW.DISCOVEROPORTO.COM/EN)

[WWW.VISITPORTO.TRAVEL/VISITAR/PAGINAS/DEFAULT.ASPX](http://WWW.VISITPORTO.TRAVEL/VISITAR/PAGINAS/DEFAULT.ASPX)

[WWW.PORTO-NORTH-PORTUGAL.COM/INDEX.HTML](http://WWW.PORTO-NORTH-PORTUGAL.COM/INDEX.HTML)

©Getty/SeanPavonePhoto

# PORTO

## ENJOY THE ULTIMATE CHEESE AND WINE NIGHT AT THE HOME OF PORT AND THE CHEESE CASTLE

Porto is Portugal's second city, located 315 kilometres (200 miles) south of the capital, Lisbon. Home to one of the country's most successful football teams, Porto is also known as the city that gave the world Port wine – the ultimate after-dinner tippie.

Portugal has been exporting wine since the 12th century, with the first reference to Port appearing in 1678. The finest climate and terrain for growing wine grapes was in the lands around the Douro River, the waterway that forms part of the border between Portugal and Spain. However,

the wine had to be transported down the river and fortified with brandy to keep it from spoiling. Thus, Port wine was created. Now, some 340 years later, you can recreate the journey of those intrepid seekers of great grapes with a trip along the Douro River, taking in the sights, smells and, of course, tastes of the wine villages that line the banks of the river.

However, Porto isn't all about the wine. Cheese is the perfect partner, and cheese is the basis for two of Porto's must-dos. Firstly, there is the Castelo do Queijo, or Castle of Cheese. This

17th-century fortress guards Porto from Atlantic invaders and is officially known as Forte de São Francisco Xavier, but is known by its nickname due to the cheese-shaped outcrop of rock it sits upon. Geology notwithstanding, the castle is well worth a visit. Its impressive yet quirky design, centuries-old cannons and view over the ocean make it a wonderful spot for some family sightseeing.

If a stroll around a historical castle has whetted your appetite, why not try a Francesinha, a culinary delight unique to Porto. This hefty meal comprises pork, smoked sausage, bacon, beefsteak, fried egg and a rich cheese sauce, often served with chips. Not the healthiest, but it's worth tucking into this local speciality. Porto's coastal location also makes it a prime place for seafood – Bolhão market is a must if you're there on a self-catering break.

The bridges in Porto are both functional and beautiful. The Maria Pia railway bridge was designed by none other than Gustave Eiffel, while it's recommended you take a wander across the Dom Luís I bridge, which is its equal in breathtaking beauty and views.

The stunning Porto Library also has to feature on your trip as it is an incredible sight, as are the Igreja do Carmo and Carmelitas – churches adorned with beautiful blue, locally made tiles.

Porto is a bustling, exciting city, so fill your boots with its historical and culinary delights.

The Baroque Igreja do Carmo is decorated with beautiful azulejo tiles

©Getty/Mirifada



# BRUSSELS

CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC WONDERS SPROUT UP EVERYWHERE IN THE BELGIAN CAPITAL

The Grand Place has incredible sights in every direction



©Getty/Tomas Sereda

For such a small country, Belgium is a major player on the European stage. Brussels is the seat of power for the European Union, and the Benelux group (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) has always been among the first to get involved in pan-European projects. As the capital of Belgium, Brussels therefore has a major reputation to uphold and it does that with aplomb, thanks to its gorgeous buildings, incredible art and, of course, wonderfully crafted beer and chocolates.

Brussels is probably best known as the joint home of the European Parliament. For those interested in tracing the path of continental relations, the House of European History and the Parliamentarium are fascinating and interactive.

Don't spend too long getting to grips with EU history, however, as there is a wealth of beauty to discover. Spectacular sights include Grand Place, the city's central square, which hosts a biennial flower carpet exhibition. Grand Place is surrounded by the beautiful city hall, guild houses and the Museum of the City of Brussels. This last building is one of Brussels' most-visited attractions, an example of Gothic architecture holding multiple artistic exhibits. It was originally a bread market, before becoming the home of the Duke of Brabant.

There are plenty of other examples of fine architecture and interesting museums to explore around the city. The Costume Museum

highlights the very best of the lace industry that Belgium dominated from the 16th century; the art nouveau Old England Building houses the Musical Instruments Museum; and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts should also be high on any visitor's list.

Possibly the two most striking buildings in the city could not be more different. The Notre Dame du Sablon is a 15th-century Gothic cathedral, standing elegantly with ornate arches and spires, while the Atomium is a 102-metre (334-foot) metal structure built in 1958 and designed to look like an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times. The Atomium holds activities for kids, Belgium-oriented exhibitions and offers panoramic views of the city.

Botanical gardens are also big in Brussels, with La Botanique and the Parc du Cinquantenaire both being highlights. And no trip to Brussels would be complete without sampling some of its most famous exports. There are numerous breweries around the city to enjoy a tour of while sipping a cool beer, and Neuhaus, Galler, Passion Chocolat and Wittamer are some of the city's most celebrated chocolatiers.

Brussels may not seem the most glamorous city on the surface, but look past the stuffy reputation of the European Parliament host and you'll find a city packed with some of Europe's most amazing architecture, yummiest treats and spectacular art.

## BRUSSELS

### Essential information

Although Belgium is a multilingual country, Brussels is predominantly French and Dutch-speaking.

#### Best time to visit

*August for the flower carpet*

#### Time zone

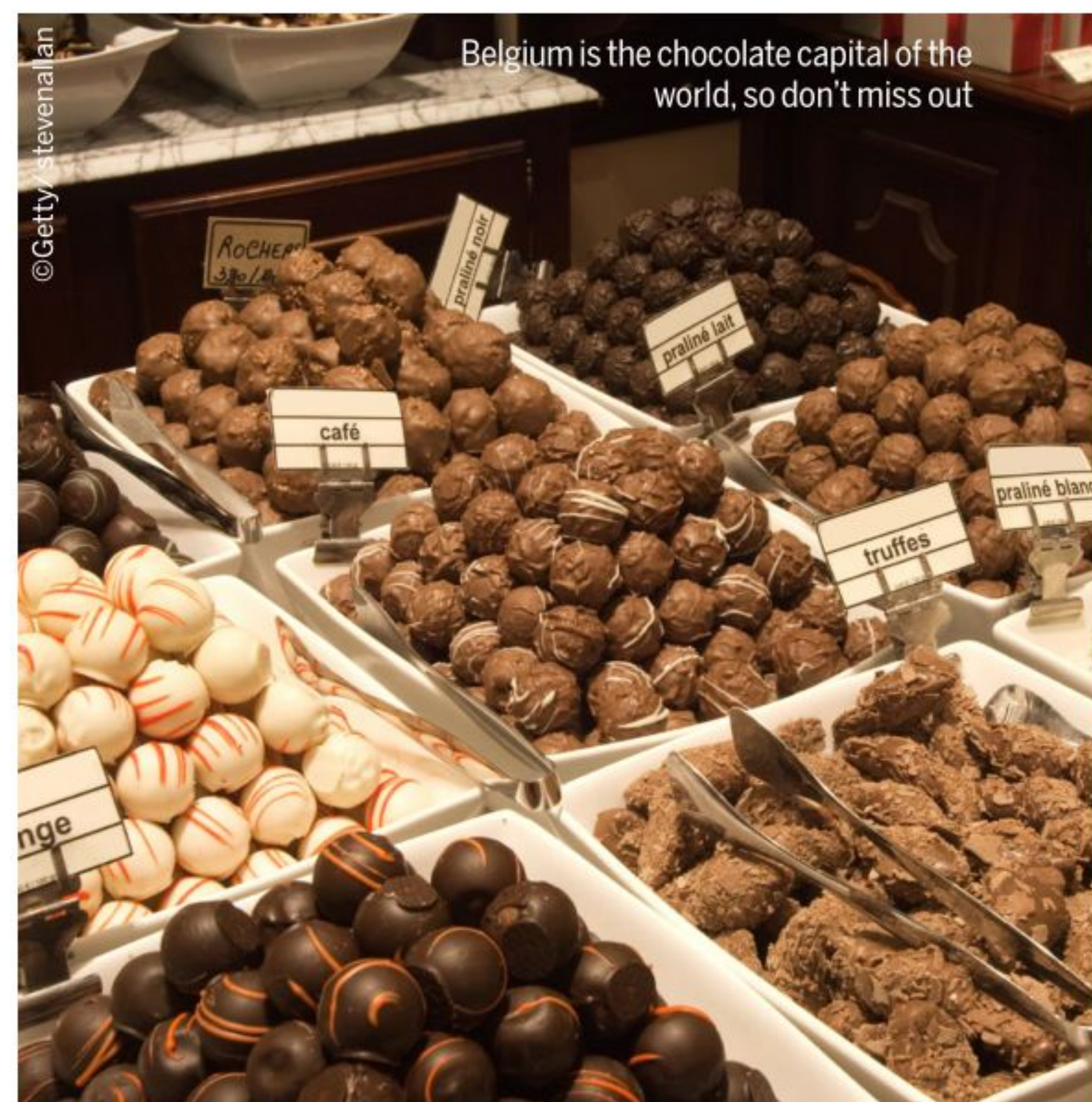
UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISIT.BRUSSELS/EN](http://WWW.VISIT.BRUSSELS/EN)  
[WWW.BRUSSELS.INFO](http://WWW.BRUSSELS.INFO)  
[WWW.INTRODUCINGBRUSSELS.COM](http://WWW.INTRODUCINGBRUSSELS.COM)



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Belgium is the chocolate capital of the world, so don't miss out

©Getty/stevenalan



The central point of Old Kraków's Market Square is impossibly picturesque

## KRAKÓW

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### Essential information

It's considered rude to wear a hat indoors, whether that is a church, a restaurant or someone's home – so take it off if you want a warm welcome.

#### Best time to visit

*May to July*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITKRAKOW.COM](http://WWW.VISITKRAKOW.COM)

[WWW.KRAKOWCARD.COM](http://WWW.KRAKOWCARD.COM)

[WWW.AUSCHWITZ.ORG/EN/](http://WWW.AUSCHWITZ.ORG/EN/)



# KRAKÓW

A TOWN OF HISTORY, ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE, POLAND'S FORMER CAPITAL HAS IT ALL

Every major city has a spot that defines it; a recognisable landmark, street or situation that becomes iconic and instantly familiar. New York has Times Square, London has Tower Bridge, Tokyo has the Shibuya Crossing. While Kraków has just as many grand sights and tourist must-sees as any other city in the world, it won't take long until you find that one spot here. Old Kraków is tiny compared to the modern sprawl of the former capital, but there's a reason it was entered as one of the earliest UNESCO World Heritage Sites back in 1978. It really is the heart of the city, encircled by Planty

Park and dotted with quaint restaurants, ornate buildings and 24-hour opportunities to drink vodka should you need them.

The Old Town is where much of the action is at, with the main market square – the largest in Europe – acting as the epicentre for the buzz of the city, which vibrates out onto the narrow cobbled streets. This is where Kraków's most familiar sight stands – St Mary's Basilica, the famed church whose asymmetrical spires are likely identifiable by most travel lovers. There's a mix of historic landmarks to glimpse in this market area, including the Baroque-style

Kraków Cloth Hall that takes centre stage, the 1,000-year-old Church of St Adalbert, or the 13th-century Town Hall Tower. The surrounding townhouses add to the beauty of the open space, making just a stroll around the area or a quick snack at one of the many outdoor restaurants all the more captivating. Turn up at the right time and you may find the square being used for one of Kraków's many festivals and cultural events. You'll even find something to enjoy underneath the square, with the Rynek Underground museum sprawling beneath the main square and providing a look at the life of





## WATER OF LIFE

While it might seem like something of a cliché to say, if you're visiting Kraków then you really ought to try the country's national drink – vodka. Coming from the Polish word for water (*woda*), it isn't hard to find a place that sells vodka. Every restaurant, bar, cafe and the many 24-hour alcohol stores stock their shelves with numerous and varied bottles of the spirit.

But that doesn't mean that you should just step into any old place and order any old stuff. Like any national drink, there are degrees of quality that ultimately affect how pleasant an experience you'll have. There are vodka tasting tours, but if you'd rather avoid the tourist traps then Old Kraków is home to a number of reputable places. Ask around – the Polish are extremely friendly, despite their sourpuss demeanours, and are more than willing to offer suggestions. Failing that, look for brands like Zubrowka, Wyborowa and Chopin that will guarantee a fair example of good Polish vodka, as well as the flavoured Wisniówka. For the morning after, there's also the herbal Żołądkowa to ease the stomach.

**ABOVE:** Every bottle of Zubrowka has a blade of bison grass inside, each of which is hand-picked and naturally dried

## "THE LOCALS ARE MORE THAN READY TO JOIN YOU FOR A DRINK OR THREE"

Krakówians centuries ago. On top of a number of reconstructions of medieval structures, this novel museum uses fog and holograms to create a realistic depiction of how Kraków would have appeared 700 years ago.

With the central square finished and after a casual stroll around the myriad boutiques and eateries of the cobbled streets of Old Kraków (perhaps it's time for some Polish pierogies?), there's still one more part of the historic quarter to discover. Wandering south will bring you to the broad Vistula river, a popular destination in the summer months, where Kraków's sizeable student population makes the most of the green and well-maintained banks of the river or takes part in various water sport activities. Here, standing proud on the opposite side of the river, you'll spot Wawel Castle, a historic 14th-century fortress that has been added to over the years, spanning medieval, Renaissance and Baroque styles as a result.

A short walk down from the castle further south will take you to Kazimierz, the old Jewish District that manages to blend 16th-century synagogues and public squares with trendy restaurants, indie art galleries and cocktail bars. It's a seamless mix of modern cool with the historic, making it a great destination to end the day before heading back into the centre of the Old Town to sample Kraków's exciting nightlife. With huge clubs dotted around the central plaza and plenty more vodka bars throughout the area, Kraków can cater to any taste when it comes to parties, and the locals – a mix of Polish and international students – are more than ready to join you for a drink or three.

There's still plenty more to see besides central Kraków, however, which is also the best location from which to visit the sombre

yet crucial Auschwitz. Though it will take an hour or so to reach the infamous concentration camp, there are plenty of public transport routes that will take you there, though a tour guide in the city itself can make the arrangements for you. Understandably, visiting Auschwitz is not a pleasant experience, but seeing the camp grounds and learning about its horrific history are arguably important.

You may want to enjoy a slice of history a little more uplifting, in which case a trip to the Wieliczka Salt Mines is a surprisingly fulfilling experience. The 13th-century complex was producing salt up until 2007, but will now take you 300 metres (984 feet) underground through a cavernous maze of tunnels, an underground lake and numerous statues carved into the salt rock by the miners that worked the mines. There are even four separate, ornate chapels carved into the rock, replete with reception areas and chandeliers ready to host special events and weddings. That's perhaps what's most surprising about Kraków: while it may have a number of recognisable landmarks – ones that are arguably worth the visit – it's able to provide culture, thrills and surprises in equal measure.

Auschwitz is a sombre and melancholy reminder of Europe's greatest travesty, and an essential destination if visiting Kraków



©Getty / Foremniakowski

Take in the sights of Kraków from the comfort of a horse-drawn carriage



©Pixabay



The 15th-century Corpus Christi Basilica in Kazimierz is a fine example of Gothic architecture

©imageimage / Alamy



# VIENNA

## IMPERIAL PALACES, BAROQUE STREETSCAPES AND ARTISTIC MASTERPIECES DEFINE AUSTRIA'S CAPITAL

Situated on the Danube River, this spectacular city has been home to some of the greatest minds, from Mozart and Beethoven to Sigmund Freud.

Much of the city's grandeur is a lasting legacy of the powerful Habsburg Monarchy. Schönbrunn Palace, their summer residence, is a must-see with its pristine gardens and stunning interiors. Take a quirky horse-drawn carriage through the beautiful gardens or wander around the tranquil fountains. Next to the palace you'll find Vienna's zoo, or Tiergarten Schönbrunn, which is home to red pandas, jaguars, tigers and so much more – if you get the Vienna Pass, both the Zoo and Palace are included.

In the centre of the city you will find the Vienna State Opera House (Wiener Staatsoper), which is one of the leading opera houses in the world. Each season, the state opera house offers around 350 performances of more than 60 different operas and ballets, from world-class artists to the permanent ensemble who perform various operas, including *Cinderella* and *Giselle*. Get dressed up and spend an evening at the opera for a truly Viennese evening of opulence

and sophistication. Tickets for the opera can start as low as £11 (\$14.50), so it is definitely worth going for the experience, even if you don't think opera is your thing – you might be surprised. Each seat has a small screen with English subtitles to help you follow along if you don't speak the language, too.

The Spanish Riding School is another must for any trip to Vienna. Even if you just take a wander through the stunning buildings where it is situated and catch a tiptoed glance at the training arena, you won't be disappointed. The Spanish Riding School is the only institution in the world that has practised for more than 450 years. There are various tours and events that you can buy tickets for, from the morning training sessions to more lavish shows – it's a worthwhile and unique experience.

The city's museum quarter (Museumsquartier) features the Leopold Museum, with its numerous works by Schiele; the popular Museum of Contemporary Art; and the Kunsthalle, which is an array of restaurants, cafes and bars that make this area of the city an essential part of your trip.

If you get bored of the bigger museums and galleries, then why not venture to the Sigmund Freud Museum? The permanent exhibition is located in the former living quarters and office of Freud, and is a presentation of the great mind's life and work. From March 2019 until 2020, the museum will be closed for construction in order to preserve original details, but you will still be able to visit the Moving Freud Museum just a few steps away from the original premises.

Vienna is known for its sumptuous coffeehouse culture, where decadent coffee is served on silver trays alongside delicate cakes and sweet treats. You can't visit Vienna without trying Sachertorte, which is a chocolate cake created by Franz Sacher in 1832 for Prince Wenzel von Metternich in Vienna. The chocolate cake has a layer of apricot jam in the middle, and is topped with a shimmering chocolate glaze. It is one of the most famous Viennese culinary specialities. If sweet treats and creamy coffee aren't for you, head to a traditional pub and enjoy a Wiener schnitzel or warming goulash washed down with a stein of beer.

You could spend your whole trip just walking the streets of this stunning city, enjoying the beautiful buildings

### VIENNA

#### Essential information

The Vienna Pass is an essential purchase if you plan on visiting a few attractions, and includes the open-top buses.

#### Best time to visit

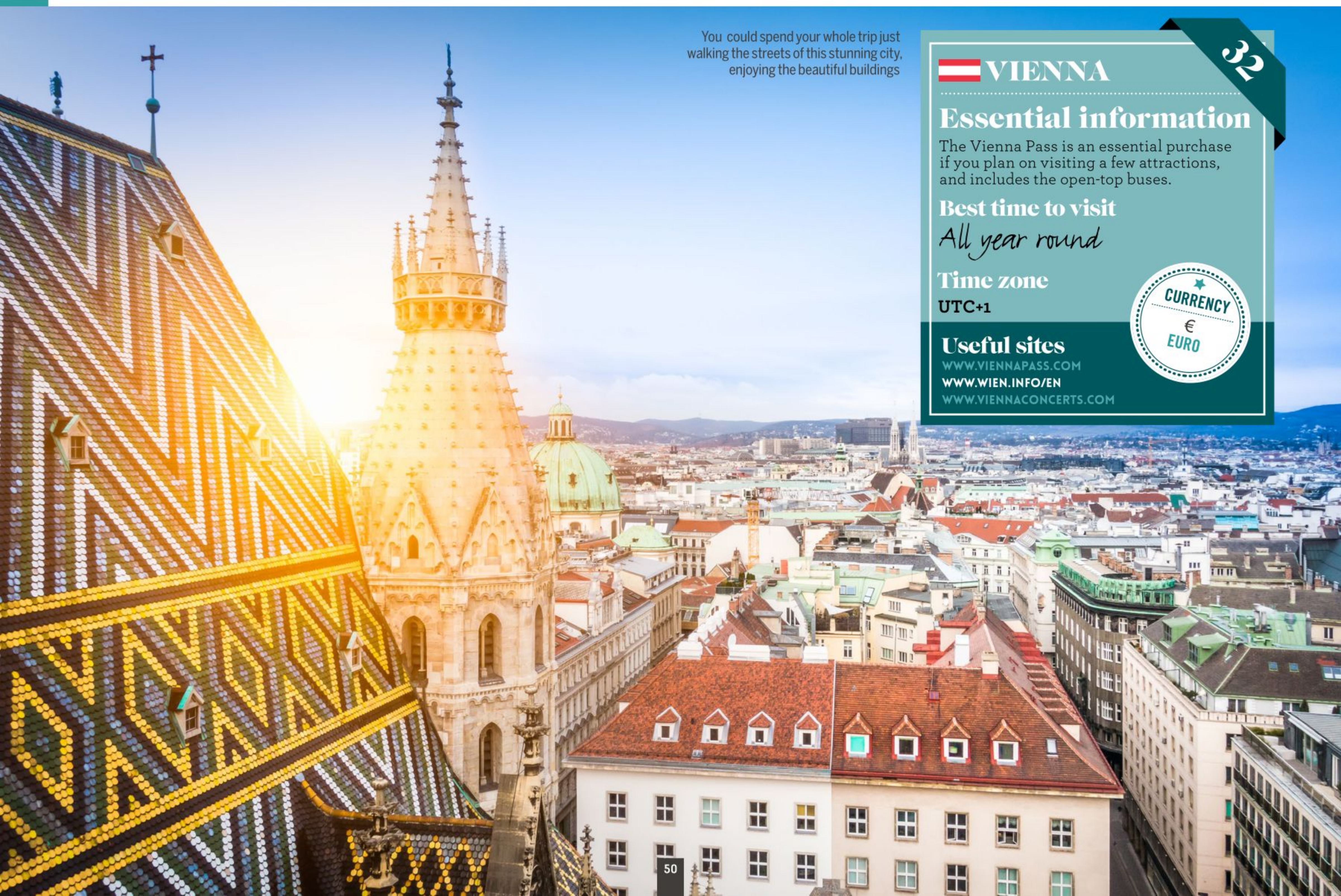
*All year round*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VIENNAPASS.COM](http://WWW.VIENNAPASS.COM)  
[WWW.WIEN.INFO/EN](http://WWW.WIEN.INFO/EN)  
[WWW.VIENNACONCERTS.COM](http://WWW.VIENNACONCERTS.COM)





# MANCHESTER

## A CULTURAL HOTSPOT IN NORTHERN ENGLAND, WHERE GALLERIES, MUSIC VENUES AND MUSEUMS BREAK ALL THE RULES

Creative, cosmopolitan and genuinely welcoming, Manchester marches to the beat of its own drum. Today, the city that gave birth to the computer, socialism and votes for women, teems with cultural and historic gems, world-class restaurants and, of course, a legendary music scene.

Culture begins at Manchester Art Gallery, which houses an extensive collection of British and European art by the likes of Cézanne, Renoir, Turner and Lowry. For those short on time, the gallery runs free hour-long tours from Thursday to Sunday. Further south, emerging from a sprawling urban park, the Whitworth Art Gallery displays a magnificent selection of work by contemporary artists, including Degas, Picasso, Freud and Hockney. It also plays host to the Art Garden, created by celebrated landscape designer, Sarah Price.

Across town, the Science and Industry Museum traces the city's rich industrial legacy through a series of immersive exhibitions, while the People's History Museum charts the country's colourful political past, and its journey to democracy.

Meanwhile, literary buffs can explore Chetham's Library. Founded in 1653, it's the oldest public library in the English-speaking world and was once the meeting place for Marx and Engels – the desk where the duo researched

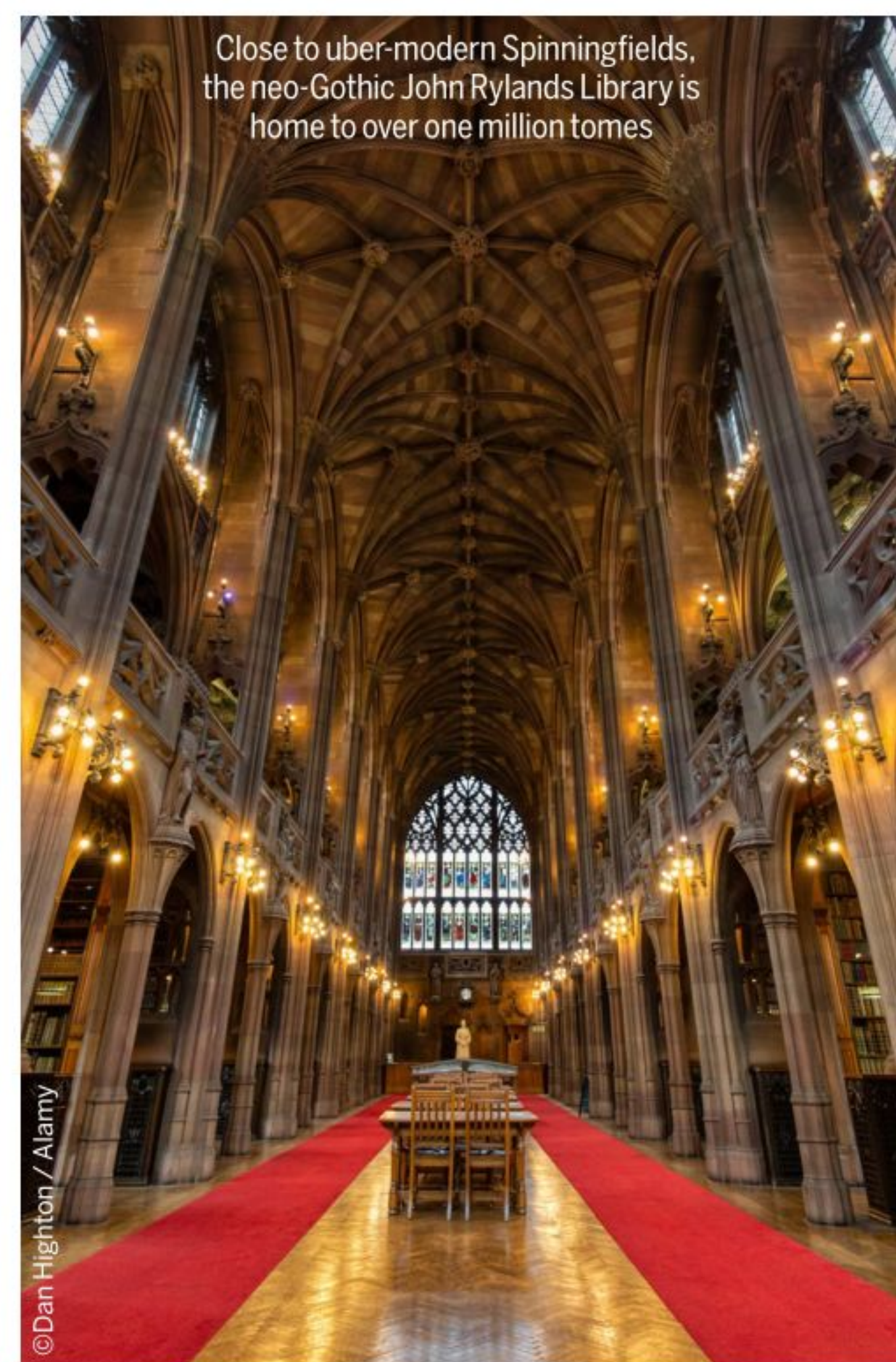
their ideas for *The Communist Manifesto* still remains. A short walk south lies the John Rylands Library, its neo-Gothic turrets and grand arches rising gracefully above a sea of ultra-modern steel and glass. Inside, its dimly lit innards open into a cavernous reading room, overlooked by stained glass and marble statues of literary giants. The library even houses a fragment of New Testament writing, believed to be the earliest ever found.

Just 1.6 kilometres (one mile) east, the cobbled streets of the Northern Quarter unfold in a maze of independent shops, laid-back cafes and vinyl stores. While Oi Polloi offers up a cool edit of street-inspired menswear, Magma stocks an eclectic mix of photography and design books, and niche magazines.

Come nightfall, the city's legendary music scene proves it is alive and well. Musicians take to the stage at Matt & Phred's, an unpretentious but achingly cool jazz bar, serving up food and drink six nights a week. On the city's outskirts, experiential music venues abound, like Hidden – a labyrinthine club set across three floors of a former mill – The Deaf Institute, as well as the White Hotel.

If pumping beats don't entice, the seasonally minded, local fare at Michelin-star restaurant, Mana, certainly will. In the area of Ancoats, Rudy's serves up the best pizza in the city,

thanks to its double-fermented dough and authentic Neapolitan ingredients. Elsewhere, neon-drenched Chinatown throbs with specialist bakeries, dim-sum dens and karaoke bars.



Close to uber-modern Spinningfields, the neo-Gothic John Rylands Library is home to over one million tomes

Nicknamed 'Cottonopolis' in the 19th century, Manchester was one of the world's first industrial cities



### MANCHESTER

#### Essential information

While Manchester's city centre is walkable, a free bus, the Metrolink, loops around the city centre.

#### Best time to visit

June and August, for warm weather and a busy events calendar

#### Time zone

UTC

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITMANCHESTER.COM](http://WWW.VISITMANCHESTER.COM)

[LIBRARY.CHETHAMS.COM](http://LIBRARY.CHETHAMS.COM)

[WWW.SCIENCEANDINDUSTRYMUSEUM.ORG.UK](http://WWW.SCIENCEANDINDUSTRYMUSEUM.ORG.UK)





# ISTANBUL

## TURKEY'S CULTURAL CAPITAL LAYS BARE ITS METAMORPHOSIS FROM ROMAN CONQUEST TO MODERN METROPOLIS

Dissected by the glittering Bosphorus strait, separating Europe from Asia, Istanbul is – unlike any other city in the world – a tale of two continents. But its charm is less about East meets West, than new colliding with old.

Founded by the Greeks in the 7th century, Istanbul, formerly known as Byzantium, was conquered by the Persians, Athenians, Spartans and Macedonians. It later became the capital of the Roman Empire, when Emperor Constantine rechristened it Constantinople, and remained the capital of the Byzantine Empire for more than 1,000 years, before falling to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Luring conquerors and commoners alike, Istanbul's geographic position, straddling two continents, wasn't its only draw – the city also marked the end of the Silk Road. Many a passing merchant loved it so much they decided to stay, weaving a rich cultural tapestry that still exists today, marked into its architectural landscape.

Thanks to its storied past, Istanbul is a living, open-air museum, studded with relics of the great powers who ruled over it – from Roman waterways to extravagant Ottoman estates. This patchwork of historical gems is interrupted with welcome bursts of modern life – contemporary art museums, nightclubs and classic mansions with sleek, glass-fronted extensions. The old quarter's fabled skyline of minarets and domes still sits atop a tangle of narrow, cobbled streets that echo with the muezzin's five daily calls to prayer.

The vestiges of Istanbul's ancient past are mainly dotted around the Sultanahmet district. The opulent pavilions of Topkapı Palace, the administrative seat of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years, stretches behind the magnificent Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya in Turkish). Built by Byzantine emperor Justinian, the basilica was consecrated as a church in 537, before Mehmet II converted it into a mosque in 1453. Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey, later pronounced it a museum.

Gazing across Sultanahmet Square is the iconic Blue Mosque, festooned with 20,000 handcrafted Iznik tiles – famously created from quartz rather than traditional clay. A short stroll northwest, Süleymaniye Mosque crowns one of Istanbul's seven hills, towering over the medieval Grand Bazaar and its labyrinthine maze of coffee shops and stalls – tended by polo-shirt-clad men, balancing spices and loose-leaf tea on brass scales used by their fathers and grandfathers before them.

Just a cheap ferry ride across the Golden Horn, the medieval Galata Tower watches over 'new'

Istanbul, and the vibrant entertainment districts of Karaköy, Beyoğlu and its namesake Galata – replete with coffee shops, galleries, rooftop bars and boutiques. With cuisine as diverse as its heritage, Istanbul is a food-lover's paradise. Smoky, succulent kebabs, fresh fish and syrupy desserts are best washed down with rakı, the national drink of aniseed brandy, or local wine.

For those who tire of city life, the car-free Princes' Islands, once a safe haven for exiled royal members, are just a 20-kilometre (12-mile) boat trip away. Here, sandy coves and pine forests converge, as horse-drawn carriages with leather seats trundle past seafood restaurants strung along the harbour, hawking the day's catch. A great opportunity to relax.



**ISTANBUL**

**Essential information**

To evade the crowds, visit Topkapı Palace on a Monday morning, and avoid the Hagia Sophia on a Friday.

**Best time to visit**  
*April to May or September to November*

**Time zone**  
UTC+3

**Useful sites**  
[WWW.GOTURKEYTOURISM.COM](http://WWW.GOTURKEYTOURISM.COM)  
[WWW.SEHIRHATLARI.ISTANBUL](http://WWW.SEHIRHATLARI.ISTANBUL)  
[WWW.LOCALLYISTANBUL.COM](http://WWW.LOCALLYISTANBUL.COM)

**CURRENCY**  
₺  
**TURKISH LIRA**

Overlooking Sultanahmet Square, the Blue Mosque is adorned with 20,000 handmade Iznik tiles, made from quartz, typically in dark blue, turquoise, emerald and coral







Vieux Lyon is a Renaissance-era district and home to the city's Gothic cathedral

# LYON

FIND OUT WHY THIS MEETING POINT OF TWO RIVERS IS THE CUISINE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

 LYON

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## Essential information

When looking for a bouchon to eat at, try to find the red-nosed marionette and the award 'Authentique Bouchon Lyonnaise' for the true Lyon experience.

### Best time to visit

*April to May or September to October (to avoid the crowds) or start of December (for the Fête des Lumières)*

### Time zone

UTC+1



### Useful sites

[WWW.EN.LYON-FRANCE.COM](http://WWW.EN.LYON-FRANCE.COM)  
[WWW.THISISLYON.FR/THINGS-TO-DO/MUSEUMS](http://WWW.THISISLYON.FR/THINGS-TO-DO/MUSEUMS)  
[WWW.THISISLYON.FR/TIPS-AND-ADVICE/TRANSPORTS-IN-LYON](http://WWW.THISISLYON.FR/TIPS-AND-ADVICE/TRANSPORTS-IN-LYON)

Europe

©Getty/SanderStock

While Paris might be the 'City of Love', Lyon has a romance of its own. It's an ancient city, one of Europe's oldest in fact, having been founded 2,000 years ago by the Romans. As France's third largest city, you'd probably expect a hodge-podge of deteriorating terraces and the glass of modern architecture, but actually Lyon is far from such an experience. You'll want to spend a good portion of your time in the city just rambling through its streets, with neighbourhoods like Presqu'île, Croix-Rousse and the Old Town at Vieux Lyon all having the charm you'd expect to see from a city that has grown through the ages.

In doing so, you'll cross over countless bridges, two rivers and climb numerous steps. Battling the latter is handled more ably with the city's two 19th-century funiculars, which pass over narrow streets to take you to the top of the Fourvière hill. Here, you will find an ancient Roman theatre (still used for events today) and the grand La Basilique Notre Dame de Fourvière, which best highlight the age of the city.

Despite how easily traversable Lyon is – whether by foot or by public transport – at some point you'll need to take a break to stock up on energy for more wandering. Luckily, Lyon is a gastronomical heaven, well-known for its high quality in cookery and offering regional unquities on top of the usual food fare that France is so famed for. Hunting down one of the city's many bouchons is a necessity – restaurants that

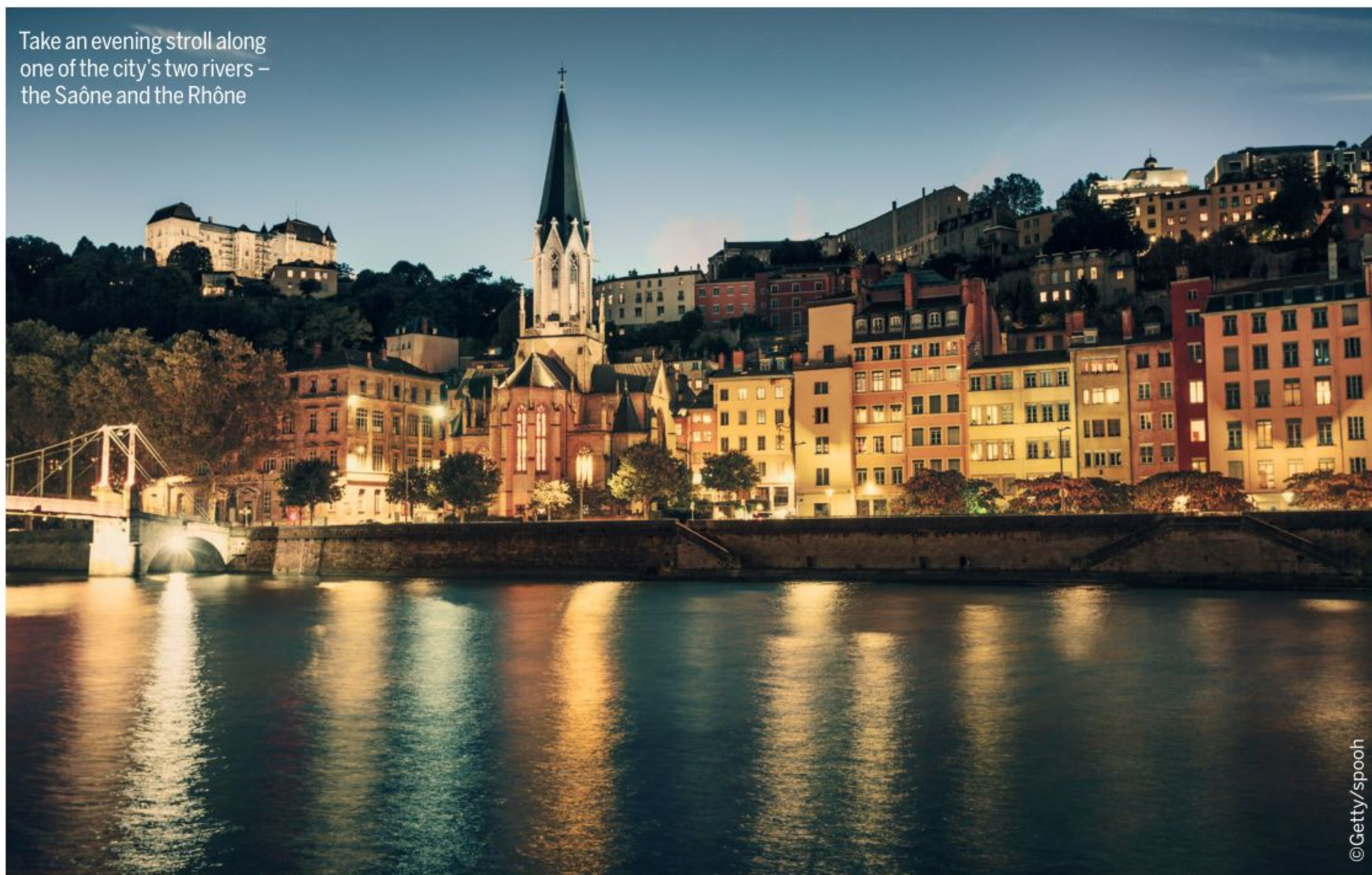
offer up meat-heavy, regional dishes like the traditional quenelles (fish dumplings). Meanwhile, charcuteries sell Lyonnaise sausages and it would hardly be a trip to France without a fresh pastry from any of the numerous patisseries.

But the foodie adventures don't end there: you'll want to save space in the stomach to visit Les Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse, the famed Lyonnaise chef after whom the international and respected competition Bocuse d'Or is named. This market hall is home to dozens of stalls

selling the very best produce and food products from across the region.

With renewed vigour, there's still plenty to see. Over 100 murals line the walls of the city, and a tour of these impressive trompe l'œil paintings will have you exploring every corner of Lyon. You'll have a wide variety of museums to explore along the way, too, from a look at the Lumière brothers and the birth of cinema to a fine art collection to compete with the Louvre and even a museum dedicated to miniature models.

Take an evening stroll along one of the city's two rivers – the Saône and the Rhône



©Getty/spooh





©Getty/ sinisaplevnik

One of the best ways to see Lisbon is by tram, the E28 line arguably being the most picturesque



## LISBON

### Essential information

Order a pastéis de nata (or Portuguese custard tart) in the morning or evening.

#### Best time to visit

*Best weather in March-May or September-October*

#### Time zone

UTC



#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITLISBOA.COM/EN/P/WHY-LISBON](http://WWW.VISITLISBOA.COM/EN/P/WHY-LISBON)

[WWW.CASTELODESAOJORGE.PT/EN/](http://WWW.CASTELODESAOJORGE.PT/EN/)

[WWW.LISBON.NET](http://WWW.LISBON.NET)

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# LISBON

## VISIT THE CITY THAT BRINGS FLAVOURS OF PARIS AND RIO TO THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Lisbon is Portugal's capital and largest city in terms of population by some distance. More than twice as many people live there than live in the second-largest city, Porto, and it is also one of the most-visited. Its history can be traced back an astonishing 3,000 years, making it one of the world's oldest cities, and, as such, is packed with icons of the country's illustrious sailing history, beautiful architecture as well as historic markets.

One of the oldest landmarks in the city is the Castelo de São Jorge. It was built in the 11th century by the ruling Moors to defend the city against invading forces, before turning into the seat of the King of Portugal. The castle stands high on a hilltop, providing gorgeous views over the city in one direction and the mouth of the Tagus River in the other. Partially ruined by an earthquake in 1755, the castle was restored in the 1940s. Unfortunately for history buffs, it may not be an entirely faithful recreation, but it has made for a beautiful and safe structure to wander around and admire.

The Portuguese global expansion began in the 1400s and took them as far afield as Brazil in South America, Mozambique in Africa and Goa in Asia. Two relics of this prosperous era are the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos and the Torre de Belém – both very much worth a visit. Jerónimos took well over 100 years to complete, having been

started in 1501, and was built to commemorate one of Portugal's most famed sailors, Vasco da Gama. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is a Portuguese Gothic-style monastery, while the adjoining Church of Santa Maria is the final resting place of da Gama. Near to Jerónimos is the Tower of Belém. Originally built as a waterfront defence against invading forces, Belém has also been a lighthouse, but now exists as one of the country's most popular tourist attractions. Beware though – only 150 people are allowed in the tower at a time, so get there early or prepare for a long queue. One thing not to miss is the statue carving of a rhinoceros on the western facade, commemorating the arrival of a rhino from India in the 1500s.

Lisbon's status as a truly global city can be seen in two iconic landmarks. The statue of Christ the Redeemer stands high above the city of Rio de Janeiro, but Lisbon hosts the European equivalent. Cristo Rei was inaugurated 30 years after Christ the Redeemer on the Tejo Estuary in 1959, and stands just over 100 metres (330 feet) – a symbol of religious gratitude for Portugal avoiding the worst of World War II.

The other global influence is a little closer to home, however. The Elevador de Santa Justa is a staggeringly beautiful wrought-iron lift that takes tourists 45 metres (147 feet) above ground level, providing some of the most spectacular views of the city, as well as a link to the beautiful Largo do Carmo square. Construction started in 1900, having been designed by Lisbon native Raoul Mesnier de Ponsard – a student of the great Gustave Eiffel, who is better known for another fairly iconic wrought-iron structure.

A short walk from the lift is an example of Lisbon's rich religious history. Lisbon Cathedral is the city's oldest and most impressive church, having been built in the 12th century. As with the Castelo de São Jorge, the cathedral was



A Portuguese custard tart with coffee is an essential part of any stay in Lisbon

damaged in the 1755 earthquake, but has also been beautifully restored and is a must-see during a visit to the city.

For shopaholics, the Feira da Ladra flea market is the perfect place to stroll around and pick up a bargain or two. The market is in place on Tuesdays and Saturdays, offering everything from clothes to furniture.

If you're feeling peckish, the Bairro do Avillez is a gorgeous complex of restaurants. Depending on your mood and taste, you can choose to eat in the traditional Taberna, spacious, seafood-heavy Páteo or artisan grocer A Merceria.

Sports fans can visit the Estádio José Alvalade stadium, where the tour includes a visit to the World of Sporting museum, which has a section devoted to one of their most famous exports – Cristiano Ronaldo.

Lisbon is a wonderful, historic city that is bursting at the seams with cultural, religious, shopping and foodie experiences. The main sights can be seen comfortably in a long weekend, but its temperate climate and size means that a week won't feel too long either. Lisbon offers something for pretty much every traveller, so you'd wonder why all those sailors ever wanted to leave these shores.

Enjoy the beauty and serenity of the Praia da Adraga beach deep in the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park



## LISBON'S A BEACH

Walking the landmarks of a sunny city can be hot and tiring work, so you may want a day or two relaxing on a beach. Lisbon itself, despite being on the banks of a river, doesn't have any beaches, but there are some stunning sandy vistas a short journey away. Most of the best beaches can be found in the Cascais area, which can be reached by public transport or hire car within about half an hour. These beaches lie on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, many providing superb opportunities for surfing. Further afield is the Praia da Adraga, a wildly wonderful beach located in the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park, where you can look out over the ocean from 100m (330ft) high cliffs. In order to have a permanent reminder of your visit, ask for a diploma that proves you were at the westernmost point of Europe.



The Castelo de São Jorge sits proudly on a hill overlooking the colourful city



# ST PETERSBURG



## ST PETERSBURG

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### Essential information

The Hermitage Museum offers extended hours on Wednesday and Friday, and free entry on the first Thursday of every month.

### Best time to visit

*September to October  
(to avoid the crowds)*

### Time zone

UTC+3

### Useful sites

[WWW.HERMITAGEMUSEUM.ORG](http://WWW.HERMITAGEMUSEUM.ORG)

[WWW.VISIT-PETERSBURG.RU](http://WWW.VISIT-PETERSBURG.RU)

[WWW.FABERGEMUSEUM.RU](http://WWW.FABERGEMUSEUM.RU)



## RUSSIA'S CULTURAL HEART, ST PETERSBURG'S FROZEN-IN-TIME OPULENCE IS GARNISHED WITH AN ENTHUSIASTIC HELPING OF CONTEMPORARY ECLECTICISM

Under the unruly northern sky, St Petersburg stares out across the Baltic Sea. Founded by Peter the Great in 1703 as a 'window into Europe', and designed by a slew of celebrated architects, today it's Russia's chameleonic second city. Effortlessly modern, it has lost none of its old-world grandeur.

The Palace Square makes a powerful first impression, the backdrop to some of Russia's most poignant events, from the Bloody Sunday massacre to the October Revolution. At its centre, the Alexander Column stands, commemorating the 1812 victory over Napoleon.

The Winter Palace flanks the square's northern end. Formerly a royal residence, it's now one of six buildings comprising the world-famous Hermitage Museum. The second-largest museum in the world, the sprawling complex spans 360 rooms, housing a selection of the collection's three million items. Just across the Neva River lies the Summer Palace, its grounds studded with impressive Italian sculptures imported by Peter the Great. Nearby, at the Field of Mars, a sombre flame burns for victims of the Russian revolutions of 1917.

Instantly recognisable, the pure-gold dome of St Isaac's Cathedral dominates the skyline and the huge square around it. Beyond its enormous doors remains elaborate stained glass and soaring columns of lapis lazuli and malachite. While its lavishly decorated dome looms large over the interior, its colonnaded walkway reveals panoramic views over the city.

Just across the water, housing the tombs of Russia's imperial family, along with a Baroque cathedral and scalable fort, the Peter and Paul Fortress offers a glimpse into the city's storied past – constructed in 1703, it was one of St Petersburg's first buildings.

Continuing through history, literary buffs can walk the streets that inspired some of the greatest poems and prose ever written – from Alexander Pushkin's apartment to Catherine Canal, where scenes from *Crime and Punishment* unfold. There is also the FM Dostoevsky Literary-Memorial Museum, as well as the Stray Dog Café, a literary hangout frequented by the likes of Leo Tolstoy and Anna Akhmatova.

Come nightfall, the Mariinsky Theatre calls. St Petersburg's most impressive venue, it may be the epitome of ornate grandeur, but its ballet and opera credentials are unparalleled.





 **CARDIFF**
**Essential information**

For more excitement, visit during rugby seasons when the atmosphere is electric.

**Best time to visit**

*June to September*

**Time zone**

UTC

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VISITCARDIFF.COM](http://WWW.VISITCARDIFF.COM)

[WWW.CARDIFFBAY.CO.UK](http://WWW.CARDIFFBAY.CO.UK)

[WWW.CARDIFFCASTLE.COM](http://WWW.CARDIFFCASTLE.COM)



Built in 2004 and found at the forefront of Roald Dahl Plass, the Millennium Centre was fashioned entirely from materials sourced from Wales



©Getty/Matthew Horwood

# CARDIFF

## TV BUFFS, BOOKWORMS, SPORTS FANS AND HISTORY LOVERS UNITE IN THE COLOURFUL WELSH CAPITAL

For those who thrive off of the buzz of city life, Wales's capital city is the place to go. Not only is Cardiff a multicultural hub, steeped in history and Welsh heritage, but it is also a lively region brimming with lots of amazing things to see and do.

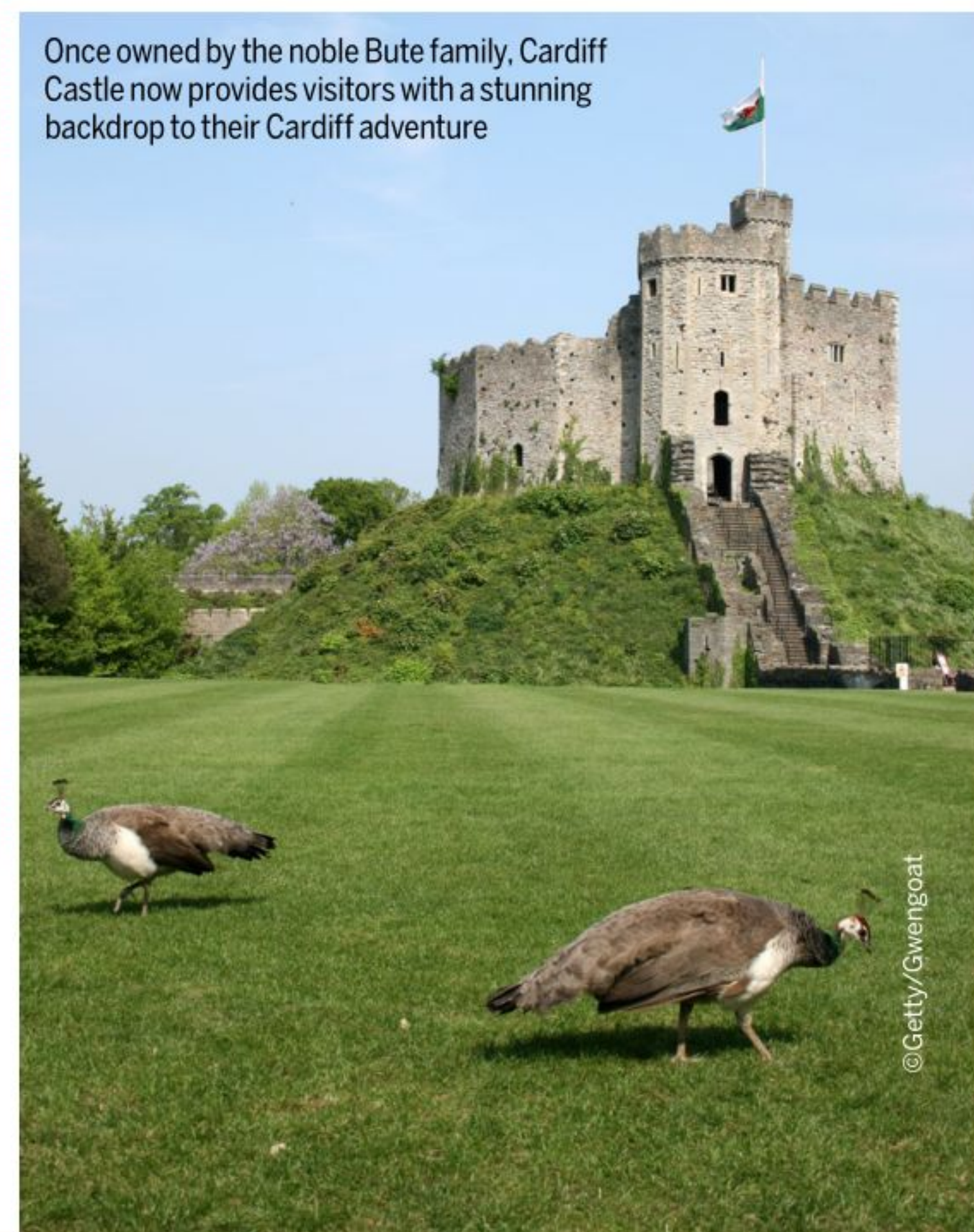
Top of any tourist's list of 'places to visit' is Cardiff Bay. Less than 100 years ago, the area was a stopgap for numerous ships that docked in the port, but in more recent years it has been transformed into a beautiful meeting point with a great selection of bars and restaurants, as well as a stunning view across the waters. Boat tours promise a panoramic view of the beauty of the bay and its iconic sights such as the Pierhead, the Norwegian Church, old docks and Wetlands Nature Reserve. Around the corner from the former docks, and just a stone's throw from the impressive Millennium Centre (where you can catch your favourite playwrights and musicians) is Roald Dahl Plass, which as well as being dedicated to the famous Cardiff-born

author, is home to many of the fantastic events that are hosted throughout the year in the city. Not only is Roald Dahl Plass steeped in heritage, it is also famous for hosting the cast of popular sci-fi series such as *Dr Who* and *Torchwood* – its tall metallic statue might even look familiar to *Torchwood* fans, who will recognise it as the secret entrance to the show's infamous HQ.

Away from the bay is the stunning Cardiff Castle. One of the city's most famous attractions for the last few decades, the 2,000-year-old building can be found in the heart of the city. It is also surrounded by the beautiful Bute Park, which is perfect for a summer's day walk and delivers a truly peaceful experience. The castle was owned by the noble Bute Family until after the death of the fourth Marquess, John Crichton-Stuart, in 1947, when it and most of its gardens were gifted to the city. As well as offering access to the grounds and exhibits, the castle also features a Norman keep and bomb shelters used in World War II. Cardiff's National Museum, which

opened in 1922, is one of several in Wales and provides an unfettered view of the city throughout its history. With so much to see and do in Wales's capital city, it comes as no surprise that Cardiff is a popular UK city all year round.

Once owned by the noble Bute family, Cardiff Castle now provides visitors with a stunning backdrop to their Cardiff adventure



©Getty/Gwengoat

**“BOAT TOURS PROMISE A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE BEAUTY OF THE BAY”**



# TROMSØ

THIS BUZZING ARCTIC METROPOLIS HAS MORE TO OFFER THAN JUST CHASING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

©Getty/RelaxFoto.de

The eye-catching Arctic Cathedral dominates the Tromsø skyline

Since its official founding in the late-18th century, Norway's northern city of Tromsø has surprised and enticed visitors with its rich culture and historic heritage. Dubbed the 'Paris of the North', Tromsø has much more to offer tourists than just the northern lights – although many who visit eagerly watch the skies in the hope of catching the elusive light display.

To aid intrepid aurora-chasers, there are several tour operators based in the city centre, offering everything from large-group bus tours to private excursions tailored to your specification. Tours don't come cheap, though – starting at around £87 (\$110), prices increase the smaller your group gets.

However, even a bog-standard bus tour will give you up to six hours of light chasing, taking you to several picturesque locations and providing you with a guide who'll talk you through how to capture the aurora on your camera. As a gesture of goodwill, most reputable operators will offer you a second tour for free if the lights don't make an appearance on your first.

It's not just aurora tours on offer, however. Husky sledding trips are available to tourists during the snow season, and whale-watching cruises set sail from the harbour daily. Both are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and naturally come with a price tag to match.

On the more affordable end of the spectrum, outdoorsy sorts will relish the city's local viewing platform located on the plateau of

Mount Storsteinen. Reached either by walking or taking the four-minute Fjellheisen cable car (approximately £20/\$25 for an adult return), visitors can witness panoramic views over the city. It's also a popular spot for summer tourists wishing to experience the midnight Sun in all its glory, or those winter visitors seeking a closer northern lights encounter.

For those searching for the city's celebrated culture, head to the museums and galleries to learn more about Tromsø's Sami and Norse heritage. The local art gallery, the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, is home to a range of art, from paintings by popular Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, to creations by the world-famous British artist David Hockney.

Like everything else, food and drink doesn't come cheap in Tromsø. For those willing to splurge, Mathallen serves traditional cuisine in a cosy environment. However, if you're looking for something a little more affordable, Tromsø has several hole-in-the-wall-type setups offering more budget-friendly food, including Raketten, a kiosk on the main high street, Storgata. Huken Pub has proven popular with tourists and locals alike, serving food as well as drinks – be aware that alcohol is priced at a premium in Tromsø. Speak to staff at your hotel to find out their affordable recommendations, too.

 **TROMSØ**

## Essential information

Prepare for your visit – while temperatures regularly drop to lows of -6°C (21°F) in winter, it's the lack of sunlight that can be hardest to acclimatise to.

## Best time to visit

*September to March (the best time to catch the northern lights)*

## Time zone

UTC+1

## Useful sites

[WWW.VISITTROMSO.NO/EN](http://WWW.VISITTROMSO.NO/EN)

[WWW.VISITNORWAY.COM/PLACES-TO-GO/NORTHERN-NORWAY/TROMSO](http://WWW.VISITNORWAY.COM/PLACES-TO-GO/NORTHERN-NORWAY/TROMSO)

[HTTPS://NORWAY.NORDICVISITOR.COM/TRAVEL-GUIDE/ATTRACTIONS/NORTH-NORWAY/](https://NORWAY.NORDICVISITOR.COM/TRAVEL-GUIDE/ATTRACTIONS/NORTH-NORWAY/)



The city has a thriving culinary scene, but dinners out come at a premium

©Getty/spacedrone808



**"OUTDOORSY SORTS WILL RELISH THE CITY'S LOCAL VIEWING PLATFORM"**



# LJUBLJANA

CAFE CULTURE AND CREATIVITY DEFINE THIS INTERESTINGLY GREEN CITY

With similar vibes to cities like Amsterdam, the slow pace of Ljubljana makes this the perfect place for a weekend break or base for exploring the rest of Slovenia.

Ljubljana is the capital and largest city in Slovenia – it is also one of Europe's greenest cities. The Old Town of Ljubljana is centred around the medieval castle that sits perched on top of a hill, the streets in the centre are car-free, meaning that pedestrians are free to roam, and cafes spill out onto the city's streets and along the bank of the Ljubljanica River, which flows through the city's heart.

There are various ways to access the castle, but the easiest and perhaps most novel is the 70-metre (230-feet) funicular that leaves from the Old Town not far from the market on Vodnik Square. If you don't fancy heading in to the castle itself, it is free to explore the grounds; however, we'd highly recommend the 90-minute tours that are led by costumed guides.

If puppets are your thing then head to the Museum of Puppetry – it explores the world of

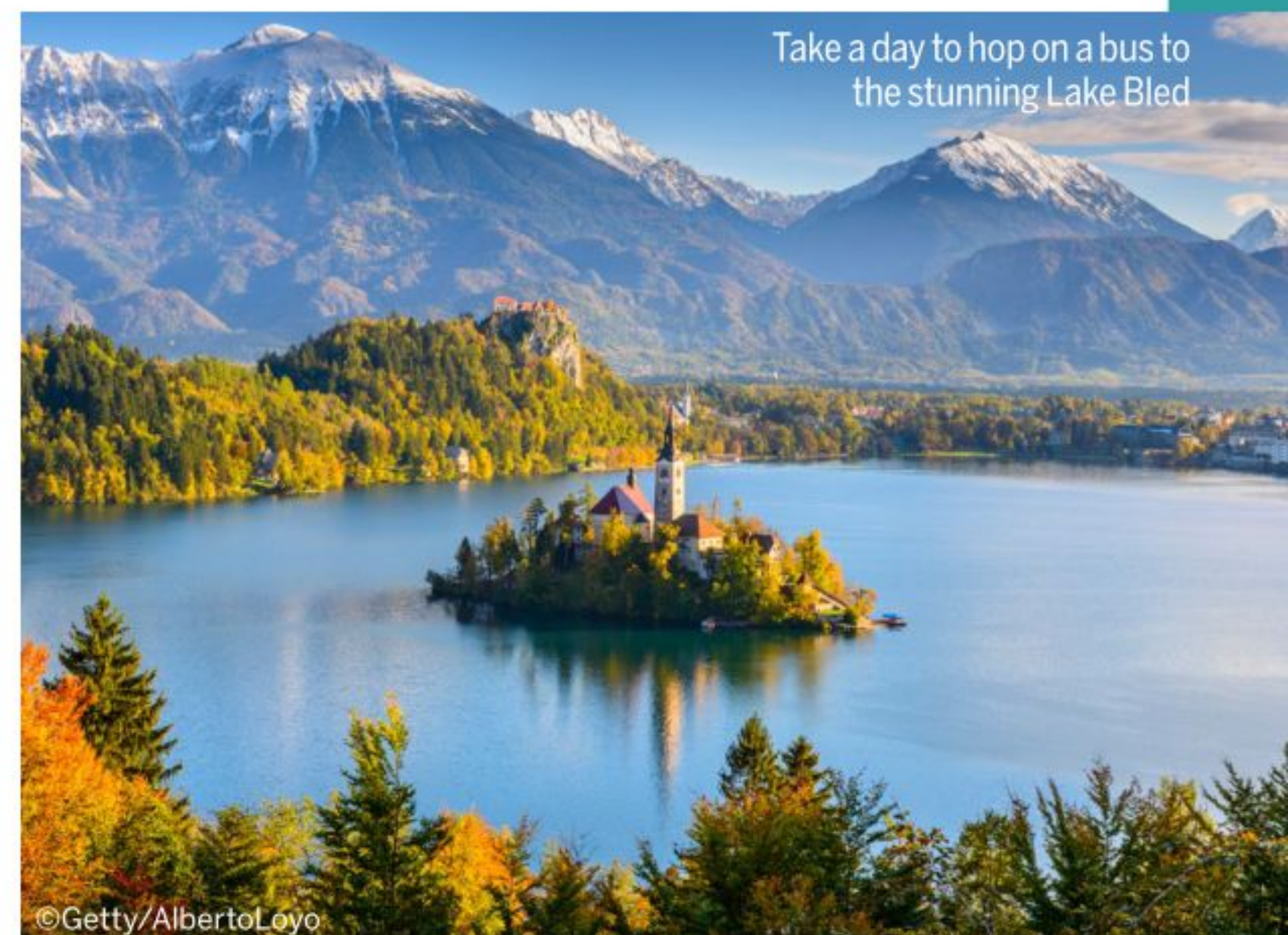
puppetry, from the manufacture of marionettes and glove puppets to the staging of the shows – it's very interactive.

If you are feeling brave, head to Hot Horse, located in Park Tivoli, for a horse burger topped with whatever toppings take your fancy. It's just a simple takeaway joint, but horse burgers are something of a local delicacy – and the burgers are huge!

To see a different side of the city, head to Metelkova Mesto, which is an abandoned barracks that was transformed into one of the largest urban squats in Europe. Don't let that put you off, though – the graffiti and artwork that covers the buildings is incredible, and absolutely worth a look. Metelkova Mesto has a number of clubs that host concerts, club nights, and one-off music events featuring underground artists and DJs from around the world. The centre also hosts art performances, exhibitions and an occasional festival.

Taking an organised bus tour to Lake Bled for the day is a must if you are in Ljubljana for

Take a day to hop on a bus to the stunning Lake Bled



more than the weekend. With its beautifully blue waters and picturesque surroundings, Lake Bled is a travel photographer's dream – its painterly scenery has to be seen to be believed, though. And it might sound odd, but the Bled Cream Cake (kremšnita) is a culinary must for any visit to the area.

Cafe culture is huge here, with tables lining the river bank



 LJUBLJANA

## Essential information

If you miss the airport bus to the city, try one of the shared taxis – it's quicker and around the same price.

### Best time to visit

*May to October*

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.SLOVENIA.INFO](http://WWW.SLOVENIA.INFO)

[WWW.LJUBLJANA.SI/EN](http://WWW.LJUBLJANA.SI/EN)

[WWW.VISITLJUBLJANA.COM/EN/VISITORS](http://WWW.VISITLJUBLJANA.COM/EN/VISITORS)



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# MARRAKESH

## GET LOST IN MOROCCO'S CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE SAHARA SANDS

With its sand-coloured buildings, bustling streets and colourful markets, Marrakesh is Morocco's cultural jewel. Located in the shade of the stunning Atlas Mountains, at the very edge of the Sahara Desert, it has been home to a vast variety of people over the ages – from native Berbers to Arabs, as well as French colonisers and folk coming from all over Africa. The result is a real melting pot of influences – and it really shows.

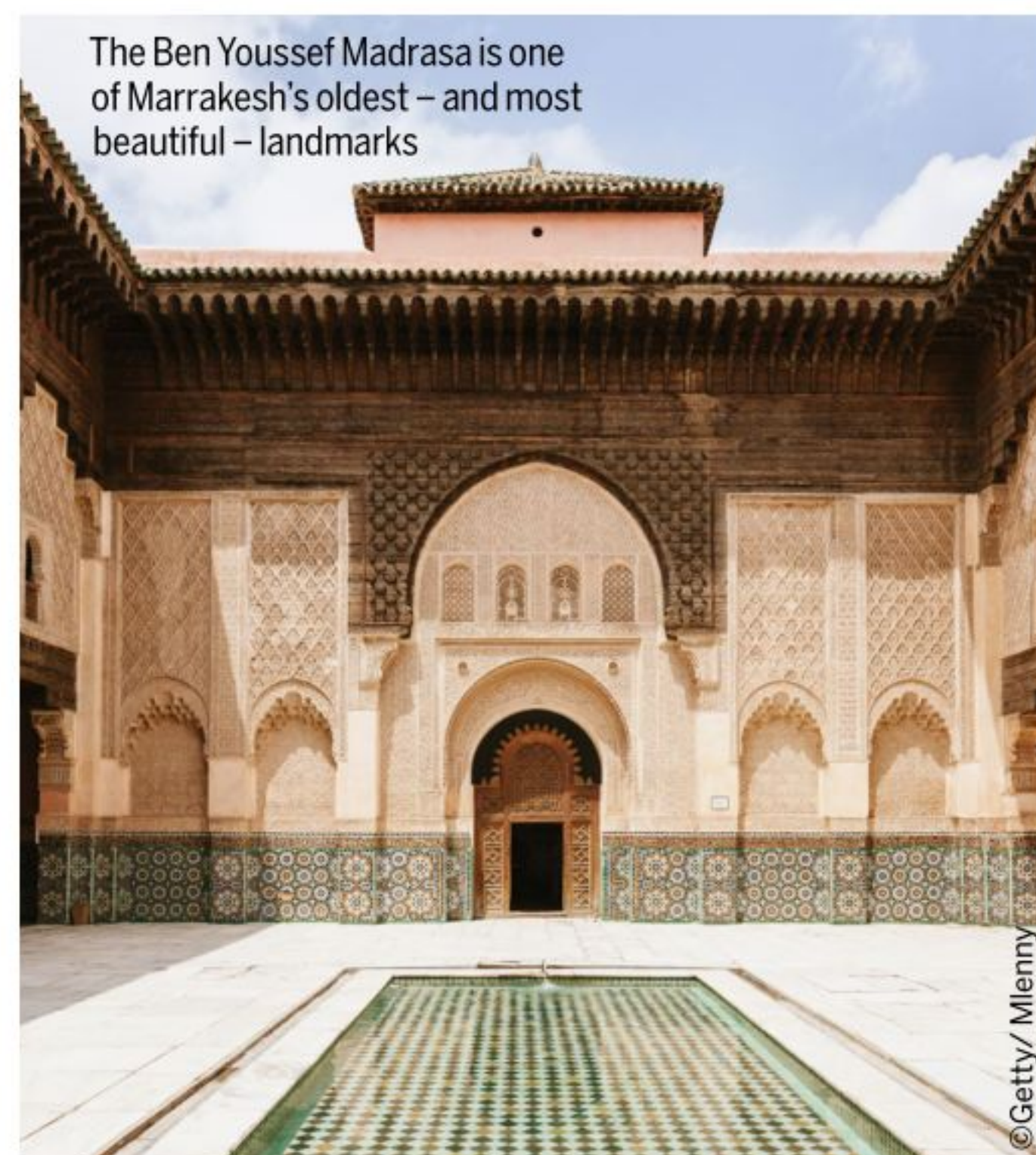
Officially founded in the 11th century by the Almoravid Berber chieftain Abu Bakr ibn Umar, Marrakesh became a cultural centre, as its rulers erected a number of stunning mosques and madrasas. Over the years, its reputation spread across Africa, and people came from all over the continent to trade goods with each other.

Sticking up in the Marrakesh skyline is the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque, located at the

very centre of the city – Marrakesh seems to sprawl out around it. If you think you've seen it before, you probably have – the minaret served as an inspiration for La Giralda's cathedral spire in Seville. Opened in the 12th century, it was built next to the king's residence, and designed so that nosy worshippers couldn't get a look into his private quarters from the minaret. Inside, there are six rooms, each with its own architectural style. The grounds of the mosque feature destroyed ancient foundations (with information boards to tell their story), as well as expansive gardens with tall palm trees fanning the pathways.

Seeking to build upon Marrakesh's lofty reputation as an intellectual hub, Saadian dynasty sultan Abdallah al-Ghalib embarked on a massive construction project in 1565: the Ben Youssef Madrasa. At the time, it was the

The Ben Youssef Madrasa is one of Marrakesh's oldest – and most beautiful – landmarks



The Koutoubia Mosque really stands out on the skyline, as local law prohibits any new buildings from standing taller than it



### MARRAKESH

#### Essential information

Unless you're really confident and don't mind traffic, don't attempt to drive in Marrakesh city centre.

#### Best time to visit

*Before Ramadan, or September/October (to avoid the worst of the heat)*

#### Time zone

UTC+1

#### Useful sites

VISITMARRAKECH.COM  
MOROCCOTOURISMOFFICE.COM  
JARDINMAJORELLE.COM/ANG







©Getty/ PhiloPhotos

If you're short of time, the Menara Gardens are right next to the airport, so make a good first or last excursion in the city

## "TRY TO GRAB A GOOD DEAL BY GIVING HAGGLING A GO AT THE FAMOUS SOUK"

largest Islamic study centre in all Morocco, said to accommodate up to 800 students. As well as Quranic teachings, students learned about literature, history and science. The buildings are centred around a stunningly symmetrical courtyard, featuring a classically Moroccan reflecting pool, and the walls are adorned with beautiful Islamic geometric patterns. Besides the educational buildings, you can also look around the student living quarters, perhaps to see how they compare with modern-day dorms. Much better, probably.

Built by Abdallah al-Ghalib's successor, Ahmad al-Mansur, the El Badi Palace ruins are another must-see. In its heyday, the palace was easily the grandest in the city, built using costly materials such as onyx and gold. Archaeologists estimate that the palace once had 360 rooms, playing host to political intrigues, private scandals and foreign dignitaries from far and wide. After the fall of the Saadian dynasty, their Alaouite successors stripped the palace of anything valuable, and left it to rot. Today, its ruins are carefully preserved.

Follow Ahmad al-Mansur to the grave by visiting the Saadian tombs, another major landmark on the Marrakesh trail. The tombs are the final resting place of al-Mansur and his family, as well as some servants and soldiers. Constructed from dazzling Italian marble, it's surprising to learn that these beautiful royal tombs were hidden from the world for centuries. The Saadians' vanquishers, the Alaouites, were keen to downplay their predecessors' influence, so the tombs were walled up. The only way to get to them was through a small passageway in the Kasbah Mosque, accessible only to a few. However, thanks to newly invented aerial photography, the tombs were discovered from above in 1917. Since then, they've been lovingly restored to their former glory, and you're able to wander around them at your leisure.

Marrakesh's rulers, no matter which dynasty they hailed from, seem to have been avid gardeners. They built many lovely green spaces throughout the city. Arguably the most famous

of these is the Menara botanical gardens, a little way out of the city centre – right next to the airport, in fact. Among the fruit orchards and olive trees, a golden Saadian-era pavilion overlooks a rectangular reflecting pool. It's best to visit the Menara gardens in the evening, if you can – that way, you'll see the gardens bathed in a warm sunset glow. On a clear day, you'll be able to see the snow-capped Atlas Mountains in the background – the perfect spot for taking some great photos.

Jump forward in time a few centuries to capture a shot of your own at one of Marrakesh's most-Instagrammed landmarks, the Bahia Palace. Walk through its halls to experience all the different eras in Marrakesh's past – although the palace was built in the 19th century, its builder, Si Moussa, wanted to showcase the best of his country's history. Inside, you'll find a homage to traditional Moroccan styles, including sandstone walls, geometric marble rooms and colourful Islamic art. The gardens are even better – there are a number of courtyards filled with palm trees, water features and brightly coloured stained-glass windows to admire. The pièce de résistance, however, is the final courtyard, a vast expanse of intricate tiling; blue, yellow and red ceiling decorations; and picturesque fountains scattered with delicate petals. You could easily spend an entire afternoon here, soaking up the sun and revelling in the greatness of Moroccan design.

For a taste of modernist Marrakesh, step inside the walled Majorelle Gardens – otherwise known as the Yves Saint-Laurent gardens, after the famous French designer led efforts to restore the gardens in the 1980s. Originally laid out in the 1930s, the gardens, known for their trademark cobalt buildings and terracotta pathways, are unique because they blend traditional Moroccan landscaping with unmistakably European architecture. The bright-blue Cubist villa (which now houses the Berber museum) at the top of the gardens looks like it would be more at home on the French Riviera than in Marrakesh. Still, you'll never forget

the incredible colour scheme and botany on show here.

Last but certainly not least on the Marrakesh itinerary is a trip to the famous souk – and we suggest you do save it until last, otherwise you might spend all your money here! Entering from Jemaa el-Fnaa square, apparently Africa's busiest square, explore the endless narrow passageways packed full of exciting goods and wares. As well as standard souvenirs, you'll find all manner of spices, food, traditional cooking items (yes, including tagines), furniture, clothing and even books here. Try to grab a good deal by giving haggling a go – but be warned, Marrakesh's market sellers drive a hard bargain!

The Jardin Majorelle was one of Yves Saint-Laurent's favourite Marrakesh haunts



## MODERN MARRAKESH

Although Marrakesh's old character is part of its charm, you can also take advantage of the city's modern side. As well as top-of-the-range hotels with rooftop pools and romantic spots ideal for sipping cocktails, you'll also find an array of cultural pleasures to take your fancy. Visit the House of Photography to learn more about this useful art, or the Yves Saint-Laurent Museum to find out about the notable designer.

Or, if you tire of souk shopping and want nothing more than to grab a coffee and hit up the boutiques, visit the Carré Eden shopping mall in the modern neighbourhood of Gueliz. You'll find it close to Marrakesh's shiny new train station, built in 2008.

To end your day in modern-day Marrakesh, enjoy one of Morocco's best-known pastimes: a visit to the hammam. Though these spas have their origins in Ottoman bathing, their popularity in Morocco has soared, in part thanks to the country's tourist boom. Enjoy a massage for a fraction of the price you'd pay at home, then take a dip in a blue pool, surrounded by sensual aromas and ambient lighting.



Johannesburg is one of the wealthiest and most developed cities in Africa

## JOHANNESBURG

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### Essential information

Unfortunately crime is rife in Johannesburg, so avoid quiet places at all times of day.

### Best time to visit

March – May and  
September – October

### Time zone

UTC+2

### Useful sites

[WWW.GAUTENG.NET](http://WWW.GAUTENG.NET)  
[WWW.VISIT.JOBURG](http://WWW.VISIT.JOBURG)  
[WWW.APARTHEIDMUSEUM.ORG/](http://WWW.APARTHEIDMUSEUM.ORG/)



©Getty / THEGIFT777

# JOHANNESBURG

**SOUTH AFRICA'S BIGGEST CITY IS A STARK REMINDER OF THE BEST AND WORST OF THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY**

Johannesburg is perhaps one of South Africa's best-known cities, along with Cape Town and Pretoria, but isn't one of the three capital cities – that honour going to Bloemfontein.

However, it is the capital of the Gauteng province, which is the smallest in terms of area, but biggest in terms of population. The explanation behind this is one of the major reasons to go to the city: gold. Gauteng means 'place of gold' in Sesotho as it was the site of a major gold rush in the 1880s. People flocked to the area to mine for the precious metal. Nowadays people still flock to the city in order to take a look at the abandoned mines and learn about what life was like for the miners over 100 years ago. Some tours even allow you to pan for gold in the surrounding rivers.

But every golden lining has its cloud and the influx of workers to the area meant that, when the South African government introduced apartheid, black workers were sent to live in the township of Soweto on the outskirts of the city. Former president Nelson Mandela and his wife Winnie lived in Soweto for over 40 years and their home has now been turned into a museum, filled with photographs and memorabilia that will transport you back to a dark period in South

## "AN INTRIGUING MIXTURE OF LUXURIOUS OPULENCE AND HORRIFYING HISTORY"

Africa's history. Thankfully that era is behind us, but the Apartheid Museum and a tour of Soweto is very much worth exploring to fully understand the horror and devastation of apartheid.

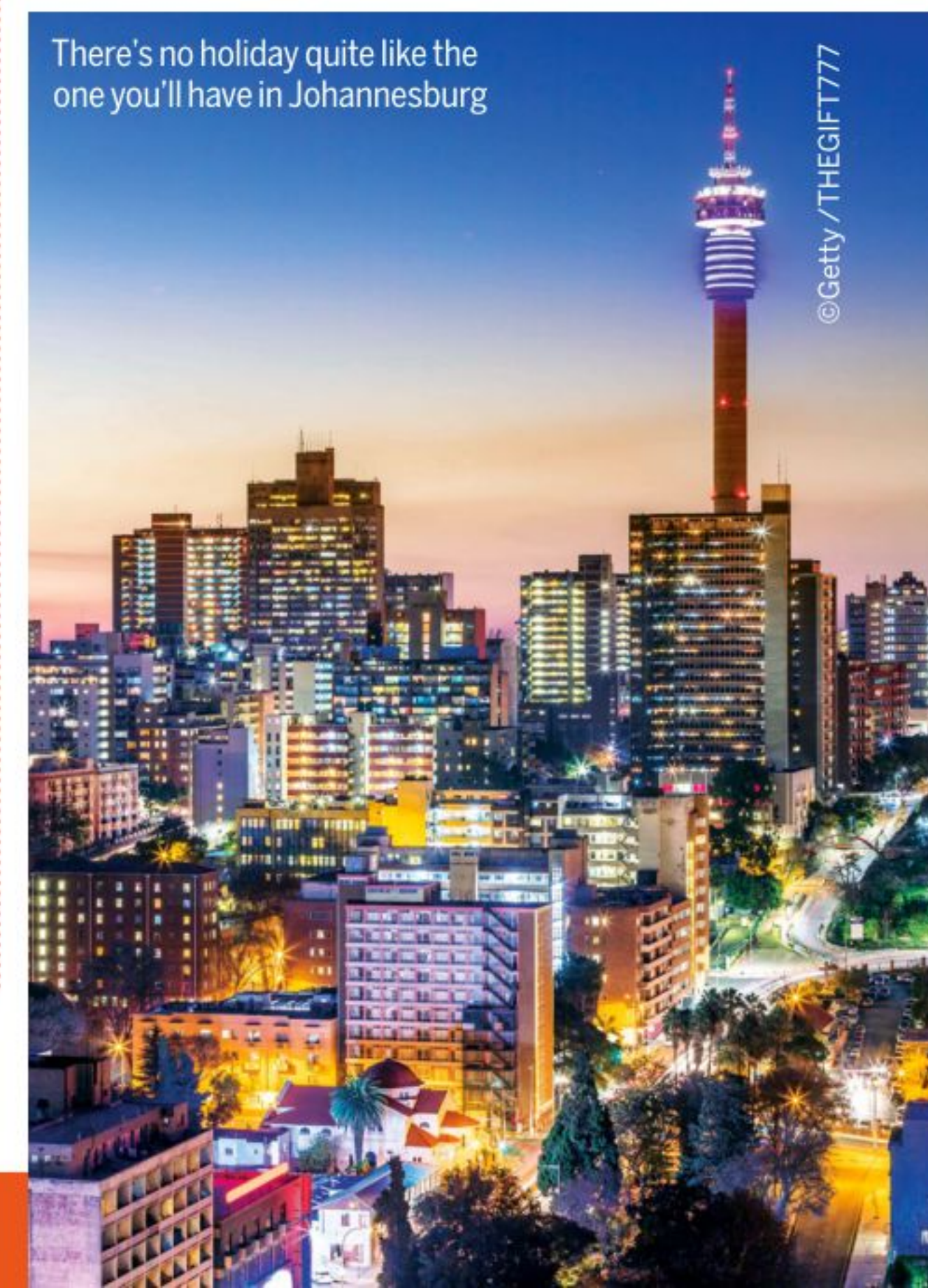
The city is one of the most prosperous in the country, and there are plenty of luxuries you can enjoy there. Braamfontein in the centre of Johannesburg hosts a market at the weekend, while the Rosebank craft market on the outskirts draws visitors from far and wide. Sandton Mall is another renowned shopping centre, which caters a lot more to the international audience – so if you love your brands, this is the place to stock up as South Africa is very cheap compared to most European countries.

And if luxury is what you're after, the Montecasino has to be on your list, with top-class dining, theatre and, of course, the casino designed to look like an Italian village, complete with bird gardens.

Johannesburg truly is an intriguing mixture of luxurious opulence and horrifying history, but

that is what is key to making it a must-visit. While the city has grown and developed, there is a constant reminder of where it has grown from, which makes for a fascinating stay.

There's no holiday quite like the one you'll have in Johannesburg



©Getty / THEGIFT777



# DAKAR

## A BUSTLING, COLOURFUL AND COOL CITY LINED WITH BEACHES

One of Africa's most exciting and modern cities, Senegal's capital lies at the tip of the country's west coast, giving you easy access to city beaches, island trips and a vibrant, lively city culture.

When it comes to selecting a beach to soak up the sun, you've got plenty of options. Plage de N'Gor and Plage du Virage are a couple of small ones that are easily accessible on the city's coast. The latter is a popular location for surfers, as is Plage de Yoff, where you will also find a surf school if you're looking to learn how to catch some waves.

However, if beaches are a priority for you, we'd recommend making a short trip by boat to the Île de N'Gor. This little island just off the coast offers a nice change of pace from the city proper, with relaxing walks and plenty of options to grab a bite to eat by the water. It's also got some great sandy beaches in the bay as well as boasting some truly fantastic surfing spots on the north shore of the island.

While you're enjoying Senegal's coastline location, why not consider taking a walk up to the Mamelles Lighthouse, which dates to 1864. Here you'll be treated to a great view of the city and its coast – the perfect spot to enjoy a dramatic sunrise or sunset. You can also get a guided tour of the lighthouse to find out about the building's interesting history.

Moving into the city proper, you should pay a visit to the Village des Art, which features paintings, sculptures and multimedia installations from Senegalese artists in a cool garden space, along with a gallery featuring artists from Senegal and around the world. Medina is another cool location that will put you right in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the city and let you see daily life in its full flow. Here you can find the area's busy market, Marché Tilène, a plethora of small shops, and the Grande Mosquée, which was completed in 1964.

To dig into the city's history, head to its famous statue, the towering African Renaissance Monument, which stands tall at 49 metres (160 feet) and was revealed in 2010 to commemorate 50 years since Senegal's independence from France. The Musée Théodore Monod is essential for anyone wanting to learn more about Dakar, Senegal and Africa, hosting a diverse collection of exhibitions on African art and culture including carvings, musical instruments and tools.

So what are you waiting for? Dakar is the perfect destination on Africa's west coast and it's ready to be explored.

If you like surfing, Dakar is the city for you



©Getty/Anze Furlan / psatproductions



Spectacular views can be enjoyed after a short walk to visit the Mamelles Lighthouse

©Wiki/Jeff Attaway

DAKAR

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### Essential information

Dakar's public transport service, the Dakar Dem Dikk (DDD), is cheap, pretty reliable and relatively easy to use.

### Best time to visit

December – May

### Time zone

UTC

### Useful sites

[WWW.TOURISME-DAKAR.COM](http://WWW.TOURISME-DAKAR.COM)

[WWW.DEMDIKK.COM](http://WWW.DEMDIKK.COM)

[WWW.PHAREDESMAMELLES.COM](http://WWW.PHAREDESMAMELLES.COM)





# NAIROBI

## GO WILD IN THE AFRICAN PLAINS AND CONCRETE JUNGLE

Most visitors to Nairobi will see little more than its busy airport and bustling, often bouncy roads as they are whisked to the Masai Mara or Tsavo in the hope of spotting elusive safari animals. However, it's worth hanging around the Kenyan capital before you go.

For starters, it's possible to spot the 'Big Five' on the city's outskirts, just half an hour's drive from the airport, at Nairobi National Park. This is the perfect place to safari for those who don't want to sleep in the wilderness – 117 square kilometres (45 square miles) of grassland that reach to within eight kilometres (five miles) of the city centre. Plenty of people have photos of lions from their safari, but not many have them with skyscrapers in the background.

On the fringes of the city's national park can be found two sanctuaries committed to the protection of the native wildlife. Visitors to the Giraffe Centre can feed the animals from an elevated platform – put one of the pellets between your lips for a slobbery giraffe kiss – while the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage looks

after impossibly cute babies that have been rescued from the wild and is open daily for guests to observe feeding time.

Back in the urban sprawl, don't underestimate Nairobi's hidden side. Sure, the traffic is horrendous and the roads are worse, but the sincere smiles and greetings proffered by the locals make it all worthwhile. The problems of being one of four million residents in a fast-developing city seem to roll off their shoulders as quickly as they say "hakuna matata".

Get a bird's-eye view of the 'Green City in the Sun' from the viewing gallery at the top of the Kenyatta International Convention Centre. On a clear day, the vista stretches as far as Mount Kenya, although the gaze is often drawn to the contrast between the tall skyline of the business district, the hip and modern Westlands and the depressing squalor of the slums – more than half of the population here live in poverty. Regular tours take place in the Kibera slum, an eye-opening and emotional experience, although be sure to use a company that support local

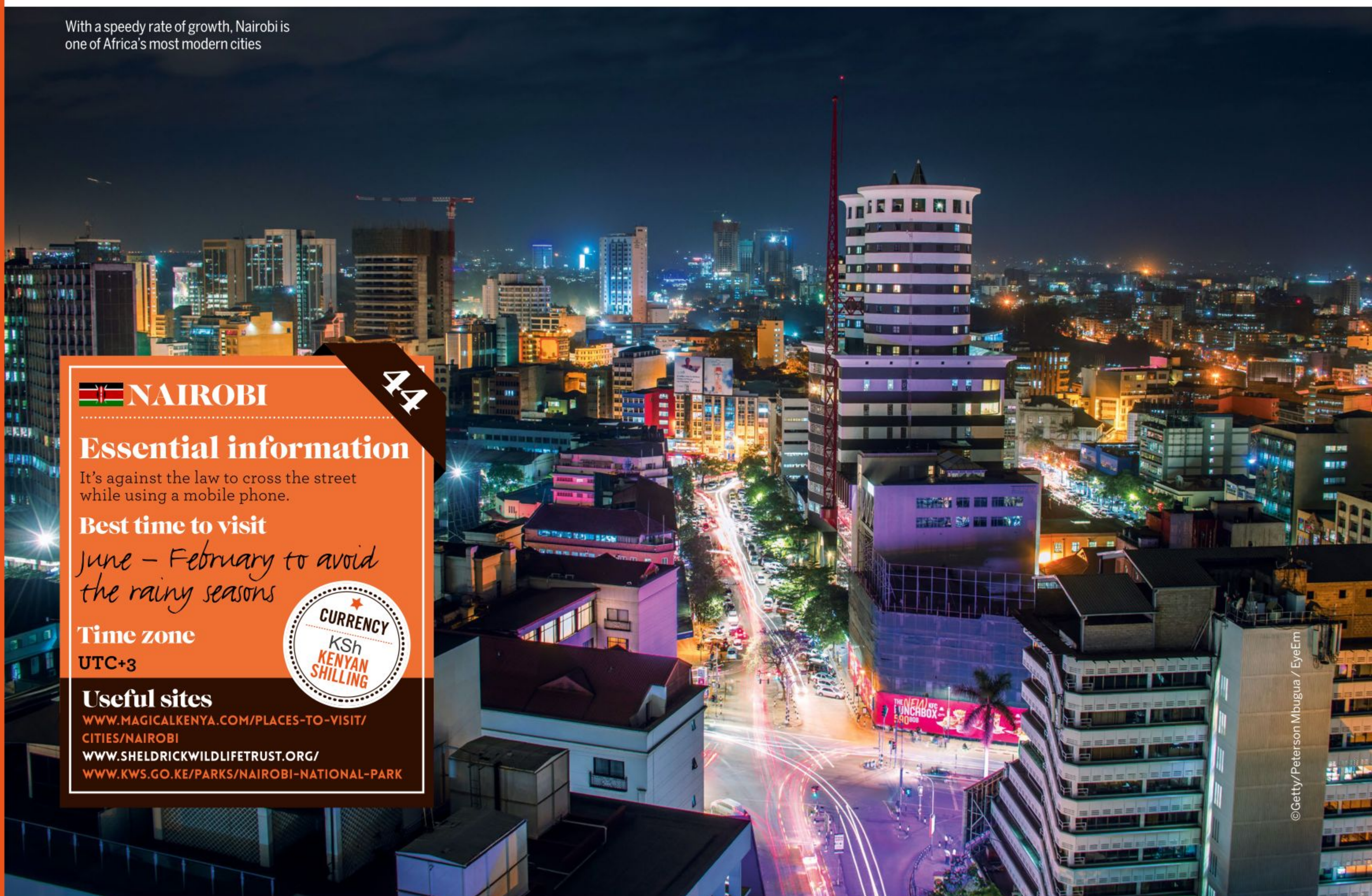
initiatives in an attempt to help the residents. Far more than a stepping stone to safari reserves and beach resorts, the capital city of Kenya is the beating heart of the country, where wildlife lives alongside a fast-growing modern city.

The Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage offers visitors a chance to get close to Kenya's famous wildlife



©Pixabay/Gryson-Photography

With a speedy rate of growth, Nairobi is one of Africa's most modern cities



### NAIROBI

#### Essential information

It's against the law to cross the street while using a mobile phone.

#### Best time to visit

*June – February to avoid the rainy seasons*

#### Time zone

UTC+3

#### Useful sites

[WWW.MAGICALKENYA.COM/PLACES-TO-VISIT/CITIES/NAIROBI](http://WWW.MAGICALKENYA.COM/PLACES-TO-VISIT/CITIES/NAIROBI)

[WWW.SHELDRIKWILDLIFETRUST.ORG/](http://WWW.SHELDRIKWILDLIFETRUST.ORG/)

[WWW.KWS.GO.KE/PARKS/NAIROBI-NATIONAL-PARK](http://WWW.KWS.GO.KE/PARKS/NAIROBI-NATIONAL-PARK)



©Getty/Peterson Mbugua / EyeEm



# TUNIS

"THE OLD CITY VIBRATES WITH ENERGY FROM ITS BUSTLING STALLS"

## HISTORY COMES ALIVE IN AN EXCITING CITY BORNE OF ITS FASCINATING PAST

The turbulent history of Tunisia's capital is told through an architecture that reflects its ancient Islamic heritage as well as the colonial influence of Ottoman and French occupations that preceded its modern independence. The highlight of this historic capital is unquestionably the ancient city of Medina that lies at its heart. A tightly woven network of alleyways and old streets, the old city vibrates with energy from its bustling stalls and busy cafes, with tantalising sights, smells and sounds coming at you from every direction. You'll spot beautifully painted doors in its residential areas and stunning marble columns and intricate tiling on its many historic mosques, palaces, fountains, mausoleums and madrasas. Walk down Rue Sidi Ben Arous, Rue Dar El Jeld and Rue du Pacha to see what are generally considered its most spectacular spots.

Another essential for any visitor to Tunis is the city's Bardo Museum. The museum traces the history of Tunisia, from prehistory onwards, featuring sculptures, bronze artefacts, Roman sarcophagi, statues, jewels and all manner of other objects. The museum is most famous, however, for featuring the world's largest collection of mosaics, showcasing many incredible Roman mosaics that offer you the opportunity to step back in time.

Continue to immerse yourself in the city's history with a trip to the Antonine Baths. These Roman ruins are awe-inspiring, not just because of the size of the complex, but for the beautiful seaside setting. That's not all you can find here either. The baths are a short walk from Byrsa Hill, an archaeological site that includes the remains of a Roman residential quarter, and the Sanctuary of Tophet, an ancient Carthaginian sacrificial site.

For a look at the colonial cultures that have influenced Tunis, consider a trip to Tourbet el Bey and Dar Ennejma Ezzahra. The former is an Ottoman mausoleum featuring green scale-like domes, the latter a palace completed in 1922 that blends modernist, Maghrebi and Andalusian influences. It's achingly beautiful on the inside, opulently decorated with intricate stucco work, marble columns and luxurious furniture.

One of the best ways to experience a local culture is through its food and that's why we'd recommend a trip to Marché Centrale. In the market you'll find sections dedicated to fish and fruit and vegetables and a central area where the smells of delicious cheese and mountains of olives mingle with Tunisian spices.



TUNIS

### Essential information

Haggling is expected, so be prepared to negotiate and don't pay the first price you are quoted.

### Best time to visit

March – June

### Time zone

UTC+1

### Useful sites

[WWW.BARDOMUSEUM.TN](http://WWW.BARDOMUSEUM.TN)

[WWW.DISCOVERTUNISIA.COM/EN/DISCOVER-TUNIS](http://WWW.DISCOVERTUNISIA.COM/EN/DISCOVER-TUNIS)

[WWW.ANCIENT.EU/CARTHAGE](http://WWW.ANCIENT.EU/CARTHAGE)



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Explore the beauty of Tunis just by walking through its streets and alleys

©Getty/Kelly Cheng Travel Photography



Bustling markets, Egyptian royalty and awe-inspiring mosques make Cairo an extremely vibrant place to visit



# CAIRO

**THOUSANDS OF YEARS WORTH OF HISTORY MAKE CAIRO ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING CITIES IN THE WORLD**

As well as being the largest city in Africa, Egypt's capital city of Cairo has a wealth of culture and history to coincide with its enormity. The famous pyramid complex found on the edge of the Western Desert in the bustling suburb of Giza, approximately 13 kilometres (eight miles) outside of the city of Cairo, is the most prominent attraction this city has to offer. Also known as the Great Giza Necropolis, these monuments were built approximately 4,500 years ago as the final resting places of three Egyptian pharaohs: Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure.

The pyramid built and dedicated to Khufu, who was the second pharaoh of the 4th Dynasty in 26 BCE, is the largest of the three pyramids at the site, estimated to have been built with two million enormous stone blocks, some of which weighed more than 72 tons. It is believed that it took 40,000 people ten years to build this pyramid, which demonstrates its enormity. These pyramids, where the rulers are buried, are part of Egypt's Old Kingdom, and also part of a larger complex, including a palace, temples, solar boat pits and other amazing wonders. Cairo's history

surrounding the pharaohs and their kingdoms is truly fascinating, and leaves a huge impression on the rest of the world even thousands of years later. Khufu's pyramid is the oldest and last remaining member of the seven natural wonders of the world.

However, there is so much more to Cairo than the pyramids built on its land. The area known as Coptic Cairo is a part of what is known as Old Cairo (an area that pre-dates the Fatimid city of Cairo, which was founded in 969 CE). Within the vicinity of this area are a number of



 **CAIRO**

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**Essential information**

Public transport is cheap and very efficient compared to taxis and car hire.

**Best time to visit**

*March to April*

**Time zone**

UTC+2

**Useful sites**

[WWW.EGYPT.TRAVEL](http://WWW.EGYPT.TRAVEL)

[WWW.GOV.UK/FOREIGN-TRAVEL-ADVICE/EGYPT](http://WWW.GOV.UK/FOREIGN-TRAVEL-ADVICE/EGYPT)

[WWW.INTELLIGENT-PROTECTION.CO.UK/CAIRO-COUNTRY-BRIEF.HTML](http://WWW.INTELLIGENT-PROTECTION.CO.UK/CAIRO-COUNTRY-BRIEF.HTML)

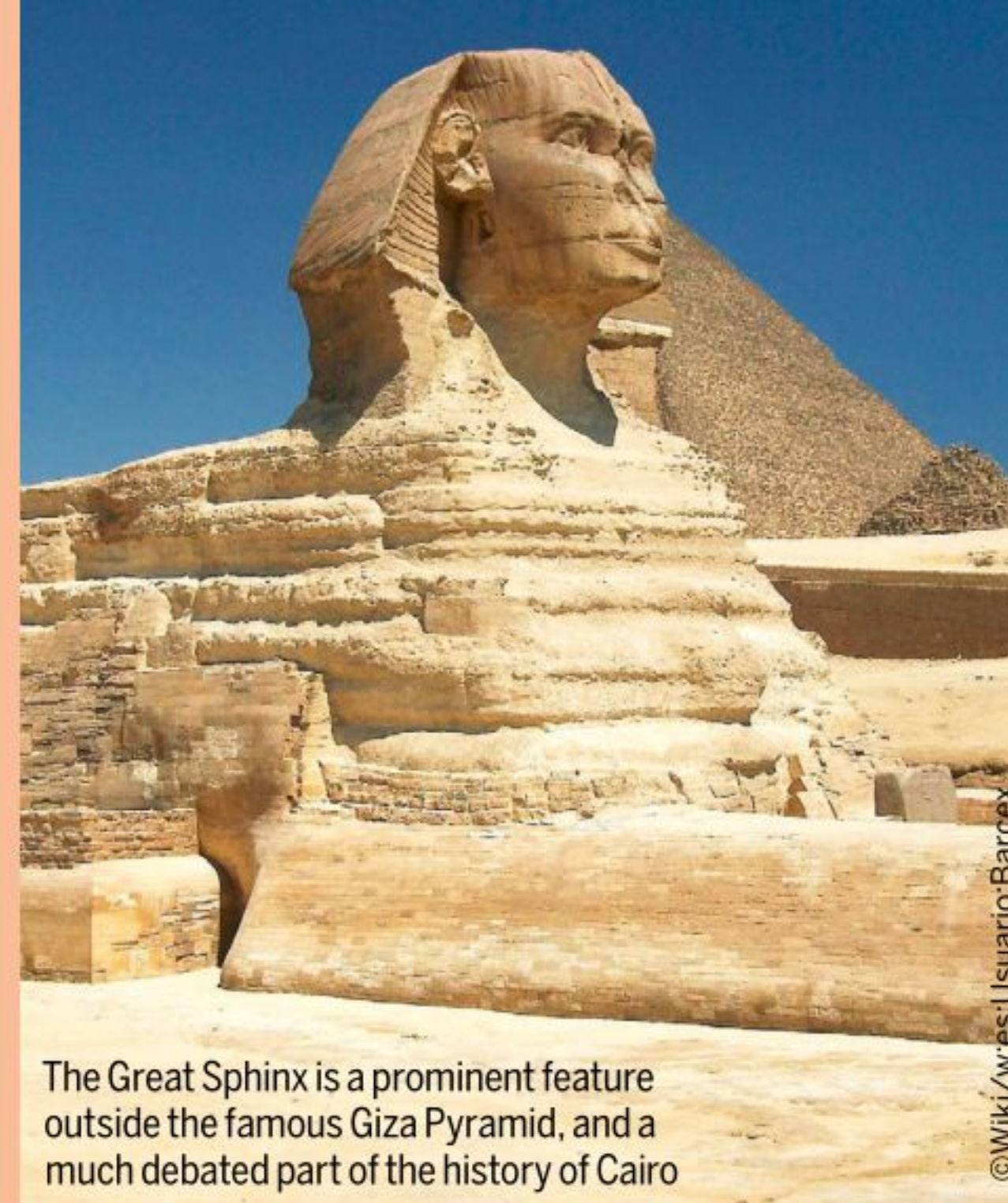


amazing historic buildings that add even more flavour to the history of the city, including the Babylon Fortress. This ancient fortress was built between the time of the Roman Emperors Trajan to Arcadius (98 to 395 BCE) in what was known at the time as the Nile Delta, and was a boundary between Lower and Middle Egypt. The boundary was where the river craft paid tolls when ascending or descending the Nile. The fortress fell under siege in 640 by the Romans in what was a vitally important event during the Muslim conquest of Egypt.

Today, within the fortress's enclosure, you will find the Coptic Museum, a convent and several churches, including Egypt's oldest church Saint Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church. Also known as 'The Hanging Church', the building itself is not suspended in midair as the name would have you believe; it gets its name from the fact that the church was built upon 2nd-century Roman ruins. Historically and architecturally, this church is a fascinating jewel in the treasures of Cairo – two bell towers, an 11th-century porch, which still stands today, and lotus-shaped inlaid wooden panels above the altar inside make up this incredibly beautiful building.

Running through the city of Cairo is one of the world's most famous rivers, the River Nile. This is the world's longest river, with its origins based deep in Africa, but just beyond Cairo the river joins the Mediterranean Sea. Throughout the city, there are a number of tours available to take people up and down the river, offering amazing views of the city from every angle.

Cairo's Citadel is another impressive fortress within the vicinity. Building of this fortification began in 1176 by the first sultan of Egypt and Syria – more commonly known as Saladin – in an attempt to stave off the Crusaders. As well as a fort, it was also home to Egypt's rulers for 700 years. Today, though, you will find only a variety of mosques, palaces and terraces offering some of the best views in Cairo. One mosque that stands above the rest and sits astride



The Great Sphinx is a prominent feature outside the famous Giza Pyramid, and a much debated part of the history of Cairo

**THE SPHINX**

One of the great mysteries of Egypt lies within the origin of the 73m (240ft) long, 20m (66ft) high, and 19m (62ft) wide limestone statue of a reclining sphinx, found on the site of the Great Giza Complex. A prominent mythological creature within Greek, Egyptian and Asian mythology, the sphinx has the body of a lion and the head of a human. The Great Sphinx is one of the world's largest and oldest statues, but basic facts about it are still the subject of much debate – when it was built, who built it and why it was erected are all still very much a mystery. The most common and widely accepted theory is that it was erected for Pharaoh Khafre some time in and around 2603 to 2578 BCE. However, some theories suggest Khafre's older half brother and Khufu's other son, Pharaoh Djedefre, built the Great Sphinx in commemoration of his father.

the Saladin Citadel is that of Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali, which was built in 1830. It is one of the most frequently visited mosques in all of Egypt. Designed by the famous architect Yussuf Bushnaq, this impressive building was financially funded by Muhammad Ali Pasha, who was then the ruler of Egypt.

Cairo's wealth of history has been successfully stored within the walls of the Egyptian Museum, which was built in 1901 and is where more than 12,000 Pharaonic antiquities can be found on display, from mummies to sarcophagi, pottery, jewellery and a collection of 5,000 pieces of treasure recovered from the tomb of the country's most famous ruler of all: Tutankhamun. The young king's death-mask can be found on display inside. Made of solid gold, it has been described by some as the most beautiful object ever made. At present, there are plans to move the relics to a new site in Cairo worth \$1 billion. An opening date is still to be confirmed, but construction is well underway, as Cairo's government is keen to proudly continue relishing in the rich history of its country.

**FAR LEFT:** Explore the city by taking a river cruise on the majestic River Nile

**LEFT:** Every year, thousands of tourists flock to the Pyramids of Giza to marvel at their structure and history



© Getty/igurhan



© Getty/sculpius



# ABIDJAN

FROM BRUTALIST ARCHITECTURE TO RAINFOREST TREKS, THIS IS A CITY WITH MANY DIFFERENCE FACETS

Explore Treichville, widely regarded as the city's entertainment hotspot

## ABIDJAN

### Essential information

Resign yourself to getting a lot of taxis – Abidjan isn't well connected.

### Best time to visit

November – April

### Time zone

UTC



### Useful sites

[WWW.CECILEFAKHOURY.COM](http://WWW.CECILEFAKHOURY.COM)

[WWW.AFROTOURISM.COM/CITY/ABIDJAN](http://WWW.AFROTOURISM.COM/CITY/ABIDJAN)

[WWW.ABIDJAN.COM/V/EXHIBITIONS](http://WWW.ABIDJAN.COM/V/EXHIBITIONS)

©Getty/Cedric Favero

Ivory Coast's economic capital is a place of contrasts. Shimmering skyscrapers exist alongside labyrinthine markets and energetic neighbourhoods, while the natural world that surrounds it – composed of national parks, lagoons, rivers and the Atlantic Ocean – provides a counterpoint to the city's modernity.

Le Plateau is a popular business district in Abidjan and, as well as a great place to find hotels, restaurants and shops, you'll find some of the city's most visually interesting buildings here. La Pyramide is a striking brutalist structure designed by Rinaldo Olivieri, completed in 1973. It juts high into Abidjan's skyline, with cascading concrete balconies tapering down to street level. Another Modernist classic is to be found in the form of the Cathédrale Saint-Paul. Its austere exterior colour palette is complemented inside via stunningly vibrant stained glass windows. From here, it's not far to the city's beloved Hôtel Ivoire, which became famous as a venue for ice skating and movie-going. The ice rink has gone since the hotel's construction in 1963, but the cinema remains. Inside you'll find stunning African decor that pays tribute to the decade of the hotel's birth.

Take time to explore the city's many markets and enjoy its street food culture. A short walk from the Hôtel Ivoire is the Marché de Cocody, a bustling maze of stalls selling traditional decorations, sculpture, jewellery and all manner of other souvenirs. If you're looking for fabrics

and tailors, try Treichville instead, a market where you can also buy food and handicrafts.

If you're visiting Abidjan, you should ensure that you exploit its close proximity to the rainforest. The Parc du Banco is a national park and rainforest reserve that allows you to step into a completely different world as you immerse yourself in the sights and sounds of an incredible natural environment. You can enjoy short trail walks or long hikes, depending on your ability and preference. Guided tours from park rangers are also available.

If you're looking for more of those contrasts that Abidjan offers, take a trip to the Galerie Cécile Fakhoury and the Musée National. The former is a fantastic artistic space that pays tribute to contemporary African art, and here you'll find incredible paintings, sculptures and photography. We can't recommend it highly enough. The Musée National, on the other hand, offers a historic perspective on African art. Here you'll find traditional wooden masks, hand-carved statues, ivory craftwork, pottery and much more.

Abidjan is known as the 'Manhattan of the Tropics'

©Getty/Stefano Gentile / EyeEm





# ADDIS ABABA

## UNIQUE CHURCHES MEET BUSTLING MARKETPLACES IN ETHIOPIA'S OFF-THE-RADAR CAPITAL

**R**ich in history, culture and fantastic food, Addis Ababa is full of hidden treasures. When you arrive, allow yourself enough time to adjust to the high altitude – and high energy – of this vibrant city.

Start from the very beginning at the National Museum of Ethiopia. It's believed that humans themselves originated in this fertile part of the world, and you can view one of the oldest hominid skeletons ever found in this Addis Ababa museum. At over three million years old, it's incredible to think humans have existed in Ethiopia for so long. For a less primitive experience, the museum also houses some incredible Abyssinian art, from Ethiopia's days as a powerful African empire.

Indeed, it was Emperor Menelik II who founded Addis Ababa in 1886. In Menelik II Square,

you can see a grand statue of this great king on horseback. The horse faces towards the battlefield at Adwa, where Menelik's Ethiopian army triumphed against would-be Italian occupiers in 1896. The statue commemorates this momentous win over European invaders, and Ethiopia remains the only African country that was never colonised.

As it was such a mighty empire, Ethiopia has been able to maintain its ancient, unique form of Christianity for thousands of years. Across the square from the Menelik II statue is St George's Cathedral, an interesting octagon-shaped church and museum. Here, Ethiopian emperors and empresses – such as Haile Selassie and Zewditu – were once crowned. The ceremony involved seven priests, each standing in their own corner of the cathedral, a golden sword, and seven

different types of aromatic oil. The elaborate ceremony, and glinting crown jewels, were flashy proof of Ethiopia's great wealth and power. There are other religious sites in Addis Ababa worth visiting, too – try the second-largest cathedral in Africa, Medhane Alem, for size.

Last but not least, you'll want to go to the hectic Merkato to stock up on souvenirs, clothing, jewellery, homewares and, most importantly, food. You can browse the stalls for hours in search of the finest fresh produce, including Ethiopian coffee beans, which are frequently said to be the best in the world. When you've shopped until you've dropped, sit in a local restaurant and fill up with a delicious plate of wat and injera. Wat is the name for a variety of stews – both meat and veg. It simply must be paired with injera, a bubbly, tangy flatbread you definitely won't find back home.

Ethiopia will surprise, confuse and wow you at every turn. Addis Ababa is the perfect place to start your eye-opening East African journey.

**"HUMANS THEMSELVES ORIGINATED IN THIS FERTILE PART OF THE WORLD"**

Medhane Alem Cathedral, the second-largest in Africa, is in Addis Ababa

### ADDIS ABABA

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#### Essential information

The weather in Addis Ababa is famously changeable, so make sure to bring layers and waterproof clothing.

#### Best time to visit

*September – October,  
after the rainy season*

#### Time zone

UTC+3

#### Useful sites

[WWW.GOADDISTOURS.COM](http://WWW.GOADDISTOURS.COM)  
[WWW.ETHIOEMBASSY.ORG.UK/  
VISIT-ETHIOPIA](http://WWW.ETHIOEMBASSY.ORG.UK/VISIT-ETHIOPIA)  
[WWW.SELAMTA.NET](http://WWW.SELAMTA.NET)





# JERUSALEM

DISCOVER THE MANY STORIES THAT THE HOLY CITY HAS TO TELL

## JERUSALEM

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### Essential information

Do your research about religious holidays. If you're not travelling as a pilgrim, the crowds of such events might make Jerusalem a struggle to appreciate.

### Best time to visit

*Spring or autumn  
for milder weather*

### Time zone

UTC+2

### Useful sites

[WWW.DEADSEA.COM](http://WWW.DEADSEA.COM)

[WWW.ITRAVELJERUSALEM.COM/ARTICLE/HOLIDAYS-AND-FESTIVALS](http://WWW.ITRAVELJERUSALEM.COM/ARTICLE/HOLIDAYS-AND-FESTIVALS)

[WWW.TOURISTISRAEL.COM/JERUSALEM/268](http://WWW.TOURISTISRAEL.COM/JERUSALEM/268)



The Dome of the Rock is absolutely stunning and brimming with history

There's no escaping the history of a place like Jerusalem. Even the grand, cream-white limestone walls of the Old City offer a glimpse of a place rife with historical significance, and at every turn there's heritage to see. But it's a city that has grown over the years, and changed dramatically as it's been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times.

It's this that has made it into such a culturally rich and diverse place to be – a destination that is no one thing at any one time. You can travel back and forth through time with each step, passing from a religious shrine or temple 1,000 years old while catching sight of a contemporary restaurant or trendy bar in the same breath. It's a place that cannot be captured succinctly.

Of course there's no denying that it's the history of the city that draws in the crowds. With three major religions all clamouring for portions of its streets, there's an intersection of historical context that no other city can match. You'll want to start with Temple Mount, a grand plaza that was the place of the First Temple of Judaism, built by King Solomon but ultimately destroyed in 587 BCE. Now it's the place of Jerusalem's most recognisable landmark, the blue-walled, gold-domed mosque, Dome of the Rock.

You won't want to leave the area without taking in the Western Wall, though, or more specifically the narrower section referred to as the Wailing Wall, the most religious place of worship that currently exists for Jews in the city. Christianity naturally has its own notable structure in the city, too, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that was built on the site of Jesus's burial and resurrection and has a narrow, winding route that is said to have been the one that Christ himself took, burdened with his cross.

The exploration of history doesn't end with these key landmarks, however, since Jerusalem has such things in abundance. If you're hoping for something with a little more relevance to a modern context, then Yad Vashem is definitely the place to go. A memorial site and museum

Floating weightlessly in the Dead Sea is on every traveller's bucket list, so don't miss out on the chance to do so if you're visiting Jerusalem







The varied occupants of Jerusalem over the years has meant a wide and eclectic range of ancient architecture to see



Israeli cuisine has integrated itself into much of the Western world, but there's an authenticity about how it's handled in Jerusalem

## "YOU CAN TRAVEL BACK AND FORTH THROUGH TIME WITH EACH STEP"

for those killed in World War II, it's a humbling destination that anyone can learn from. Then there's the Tower of David, a citadel complex near the Jaffa Gate with rooms filled with archaeological discoveries that tell the story of the city – and of Judaism – throughout the ages. Not only does the citadel itself offer panoramic views over the Old City below – try to time it for sunset to get the perfect vista – but the regular Night Spectacular light shows use the citadel walls as a screen for an audio-visual display that is well worth sticking around for.

But history isn't all that Jerusalem has going for it. Foodies will have enough reasons to hop on the plane right away, whether it's traditional or contemporary cuisine that they're looking for. Israeli food is renowned for the uniqueness of

its identity, and you'll be lost for all the choice: hummus, falafel, shakshuka and shawarma are among the tastes that have hit the global mainstream and are undoubtedly in need of sampling among the streets of Jerusalem. Not to mention the numerous breads that originate from the region; from pita to matzah, you'll find it all. But then there are the less commonly known delicacies, such as boureka pastries and stuffed aubergines to sweet treats like challah, rugelach and baklava. But there's still a modern edge to the city's dining, too, with trendy tapas bars and fine dining easy to locate if you really want it. If you're looking to taste something more modern within Jerusalem, a short trip to the west to the district of Ein Kareem is well worth the time. This cool, bohemian artists' village conjures up an

utterly different vibe to the marketplaces and stone walls of the Old City.

Naturally you won't want to overlook the lands that lie outside of the city, either, and there are a number of opportunities to enjoy the natural environments of Israel, which may be surprising for a country that is primarily desert. Exploring the sands by camel or quad bike are options that you might well want to take up, but there's also a national park that encircles Jerusalem itself or the nearby Gazelle Valley where wild, roaming gazelle can be spotted. And of course you shouldn't miss the chance to witness the salty waters of the Dead Sea; only a 90-minute drive from the city, this is a day trip that any visitor to the Holy City will want to make. And perhaps that's the key thing about Jerusalem: it's so abundant in historical, cultural, architectural and natural points of interest that even if you're not making a trip for religious purposes, you'll be able to get the sense of a city so original in its identity that it'll be hard not to fall in love.



## KNOW THE ETIQUETTE

As you might expect from the meeting point of three different religions, there are a number of particulars that need to be considered if you hope to avoid making a social faux pas. While there's no expectation for modest attire while exploring the city, when visiting any of its numerous religious monuments and landmarks you should be sure to wear appropriate clothing and dress in accordance with the sort of respect you would expect of these institutions. Perhaps more than anywhere else, it's also polite to be mindful of others' religious beliefs and the manners in which they worship.

At the Dome of the Rock, for example, women will need to wear headscarves regardless of religious beliefs, while it's also forbidden to worship other religions here. When leaving the Western Wall, it's expected to do so backwards so as to avoid disrespecting its religious significance. Even smaller things like members of the opposite sex can cause offense, so it's important to look up the necessary cultural expectations.

**ABOVE:** Even if you're not a believer of a particular religion, Jerusalem is still a fascinating place to directly witness the different cultures of each group



**Essential information**

Be sure to look into the local customs; though it is progressive, the UAE is a Muslim country.

**Best time to visit**

*October to March (for cool weather and sunny skies)*

**Time zone**

UTC+4

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VISITDUBAI.COM](http://WWW.VISITDUBAI.COM)  
[WWW.PLATINUM-HERITAGE.COM](http://WWW.PLATINUM-HERITAGE.COM)  
[WWW.ARBAN-ADVENTURES.COM](http://WWW.ARBAN-ADVENTURES.COM)



Dubai's skyline displays an eclectic array of megalithic skyscrapers

©Getty/Variantia

# DUBAI

## TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION CONVERGE IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' DREAMY DESERT METROPOLIS

Gazing out over Dubai's skyline, an eclectic array of megalithic skyscrapers jutting through the clouds, it is hard to imagine this megacity began as a sleepy fishing village. To most visitors, the city is a land of awe and opulence, a shopper's paradise and a spectacle that must be seen to be believed.

One of seven emirates, or states, in the United Arab Emirates, Dubai straddles the coast of the Arabian Gulf, with swathes of meticulously designed luxury hotels and resorts on hand to cater to every whim and desire. You are only ever a stone's throw away from architectural marvels – from the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa, to The Dubai Mall at its feet, home to more than 1,500 shops and restaurants.

However, beyond the expected glitz and glamour lies an even more enthralling world of adventure for those who seek it. Inland, the desert stretches out, an ocean of sand, dotted with scant bursts of bushes and trees. Dubai's wandering Bedouin nomads once called this land home, carrying on thousands of years of tradition

in the forms of poetry, falconry and the ancient art of Arabian hospitality.

Though the desert is rich in oryx, desert foxes, snakes and mice, to the ancient Emirati, the peregrine falcon has always been man's best friend – a relationship that endures to this day, as hunters train their birds of prey with drones.

Despite the encroachment of modernity, coffee remains as it always has been: a ritualistic act, steeped in tradition. Historically, deals were made and alliances forged over steaming cups in the majlis, a space used to socialise. Modern visitors can enjoy this experience in the open desert, underneath the twinkling stars.

More adventurous types can venture into the wadis, or valleys, of the Al-Hajar Mountains – the highest in the Arabian Peninsula. Set against this dramatic backdrop is the oasis town of Hatta, home to historic forts, watchtowers and traditional irrigation systems.

Though rainfall is sparse in the region, it collects in the neighbouring gullies, aided by local dams, which make the perfect place for some

mountaineering, biking or even just a spot of camping, amid the patter of leaping goat hooves, with food on an open fire.

Back in the city, the Old Town sits along the Creek, often seen to delineate 'old' and 'new' Dubai. Ironically, Al-Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood is on the 'new' side, a labyrinthine network of homes. Traditionally, houses were built of coral and limestone, held together with a mortar of seashells and lime. These featured wind towers and courtyards, to aid air circulation. Today, they host a variety of shops, art galleries and cafés, a quiet contrast to bustling Deira on the other side of the Creek. Here, wooden dhows stock up on electronics, car parts and other goods, to ship to India and Africa, bringing back food and livestock.

Contrary to popular belief, Dubai is a land of bold contrasts, where loud and quiet meet sand, stone and sea, and where people converge from all over the world. The result is a delicate harmony of mesmerising peaks and enchanting troughs well worth visiting.




**TEL AVIV**
**Essential information**

Tel Aviv is largely flat, so consider hiring a city bicycle from one of the 150 rental stations.

**Best time to visit**

*March to April and  
September to November*

**Time zone**

UTC+2

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VISIT-TEL-AVIV.COM/EN](http://WWW.VISIT-TEL-AVIV.COM/EN)

[HTTPS://ISRAEL.TRAVEL/GOISRAEL](https://ISRAEL.TRAVEL/GOISRAEL)

[WWW.BAUHAUS-CENTER.COM/TEL-AVIV](http://WWW.BAUHAUS-CENTER.COM/TEL-AVIV)



# TEL AVIV

## DISCOVER A HIPSTER'S PARADISE OF SUN, SEA, SAND, SKYSCRAPERS AND LITTLE SLEEP

If Jerusalem is Israel's history, then Tel Aviv is arguably its future – a modern, vibrant city on the coast of the Mediterranean that oozes with charm and a great feeling of cool. While it may be less populous by half, Tel Aviv is the country's economic and technological powerhouse. As such, its residents are young and energetic, filling the dance floors of the city's numerous pulsating nightclubs or supping cocktails in hidden speakeasy bars.

Tel Aviv actually means 'Ancient Hill of Spring' in Hebrew and that is, in many ways, rather apt since the city is ever-changing. Indeed, the skyline is punctuated by skyscrapers; modern edifices that point towards ongoing success. Not that the city's buildings are not without architectural merit. Visit the White City part of town and there are 4,000 buildings in the Bauhaus style. It's the largest concentration of such buildings in the world, prompting UNESCO to proclaim it a World Cultural Heritage Site in 2003.

It's certainly interesting to note how quickly Tel Aviv has established itself. Just 110 years old, having been formed on the outskirts of Jaffa as a housing estate, it has grown considerably thanks to an influx of Jewish refugees over the decades. Today, it's definitely worth paying a visit to Jaffa, if only to see the contrast. Here you'll find independent cafes and restaurants, a bustling flea market and cultural boutiques selling small items and paintings.

Similar changes have taken place in Florentin, an area that has also attracted great numbers of young people. It comes alive at night as small bars pulsate with large crowds, but there is also an industrial vibe, particularly during the day. Likewise, Neve Tzedek is again young and fashionable and, like Florentin, it's a former poverty-stricken area that has benefitted from great investment, turning it into an artsy hub. You'll find restaurants serving up a very wide breadth of food here, as well as an eclectic range of architectural styles.

Being by the sea also means visitors can relax in Tel Aviv should the partying become too much. The promenade fronts on to 13 sandy beaches, and it benefits from warm waters and wonderful weather. Some parts are busier and more hectic than others so you can pick and choose your vibe. The more adventurous might want to try watersports, while others may prefer to simply lie back and relax. After all, you'll want to conserve your energy to enjoy the rest of what Tel Aviv has to offer.



Cape Town not only has plenty of historical and cultural sights to see, but also spectacular beaches



## CAPE TOWN

### Essential information

Public transport to many areas is limited, so hire a car if possible.

#### Best time to visit

*December to February  
(for perfect weather)*

#### Time zone

UTC+2

#### Useful sites

[WWW.CAPETOWN.TRAVEL](http://WWW.CAPETOWN.TRAVEL)

[WWW.CAPETOWN.GOV.ZA](http://WWW.CAPETOWN.GOV.ZA)

[WWW.CAPETOURISM.CO.ZA/INFO-CAPE-TOWN/TOURISM-CAPE-TOWN-TRAVEL.HTML](http://WWW.CAPETOURISM.CO.ZA/INFO-CAPE-TOWN/TOURISM-CAPE-TOWN-TRAVEL.HTML)



# CAPE TOWN

## A CITY BURSTING WITH SURPRISES, FROM BREATHTAKING MOUNTAINS TO PENGUINS ON THE BEACH

The Western Cape of South Africa is famed for its lush winelands, stunning beaches, forests, lagoons and much more, but the city of Cape Town, South Africa's southwestern capital and port (which is also home to the majority of the Western Cape population), is a breathtaking place with so much natural beauty. Despite the hardship and struggles that the city has seen in the past, it has succeeded in becoming a popular holiday destination.

The most prominent characteristic of the port city is the flat-topped mountain that overlooks Cape Town, Table Mountain. Standing at 1,085 metres (3,559 feet) tall, the mountain is often dusted with clouds, making it resemble a tablecloth, and giving way to its name. The stunning views from the top are world-famous, making it South Africa's most iconic landmark. Every year, tourists exclusively pick out Table Mountain as an excursion thanks to the cable cart system which was installed in 1929, and can now carry 65 passengers at a time, meaning that navigating the rocky terrain to the summit is not the only way to see the incredible views. However, there are plenty who take the trek to the top,

conquering it in somewhere between one to three hours. Abseiling is also an option and at 112 metres (367 feet), it is the longest commercial abseil in the world.

On the east side of Table Mountain is Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, which is acclaimed as one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world. Founded in 1913, this garden spans 1,300 acres and grows 7,000 of the 22,000 plant species found in South Africa. Due to the positioning of the national park, the rainfall on this side is much higher than on the other faces, resulting in dense vegetation throughout the National Park. Entrance into the garden is around £4 (\$5), and is well worth it to experience the unique flora of the garden, which is divided into several sections – from a fragrance garden, to an area devoted entirely to medicinal plants. It also features a sculpture garden and a wild almond hedge planted by Jan van Riebeeck in 1660 to form the boundary of the Dutch outpost. Among the flora is the Cape's famous fynbos, which is Dutch for 'fine-leaved plants'. The vegetation of this plant found on the mountain is better than anywhere else in the world. The



**ABOVE:** Head to Century City for a spot of shopping at Canal Walk mall, where you'll also find plenty of bars, eateries and movie theatres

mountain's fauna is also very impressive – caracals (wild cats), rock hyraxes and chacma baboons all roam across it. However, arguably one of the most impressive species to be found in Cape Town is the South African penguin. The beautiful Boulders Beach, on the northeastern side of the Cape Peninsula some 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the mountain, is home to a large



colony of South African Penguins, and is a crowd pleaser for tourists who visit the city.

But Cape Town's rich environment has more to offer than just its botanical gardens and spectacular views. The city was once embroiled in one of the biggest political movements in history, the setting of which is just seven kilometres (four miles) off the coast of Cape Town in Table Bay. Robben Island, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is clearly visible from mainland Cape Town and accessible via a ferry from the Nelson Mandela Gateway at the V&A Waterfront. Throughout history, the island has been used as a whaling station, leper colony, and place of exile. But Robben Island is best known for its period as a maximum security political prison, where anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela was held for 18 years of his 27-year sentence before he was elected as the country's first democratic president.

After the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s, the prison was shut down. Today, the building still stands as a museum to the sombre part of South Africa's history. Nowadays, the island is open to visitors, many of whom travel to the museum (where former prisoners hold guided tours) to pay homage to Mandela and visit the tiny cell where he was held.

Back on the shore of Cape Town, the rocky Cape Peninsula dips its toes into the Atlantic Ocean, and is the most southwestern point of the African continent. It is a spectacular vantage point, with Cape Point at the southern end of the peninsula. This World Heritage Site is famed for its beautiful beach and drastic cliff tops that run adjacent to it.

The Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve can also be found along the peninsula and is one of the great capes of the South Atlantic Ocean.

## "THE ROCKY CAPE PENINSULA DIPS ITS TOES INTO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN"

Boulders Beach is home to a colony of South African penguins, and the only place in the world where you can get up close to them in the wild



No visit to Cape Town is complete without a tour of one of the many nearby vineyards



Animals found here include one of the two mainland colonies of South African penguins, approximately 250 species of birds, several species of antelope, baboons as well as Cape mountain zebra.

With so much to experience within the city of Cape Town, it's understandable why it attracts so many visitors every year.

## THE BO KAAP

Reflecting the colourful background of South Africa, the area known as the Bo Kaap (meaning 'above the cape'), with its brightly painted houses and quaint cobbled streets, is a picturesque suburb within Cape Town with a lot of history. Most notably it is home to the country's oldest mosque, the Auwal Mosque in Dorp Street, which was built in 1794. However, Muslims were not permitted to practice their religion in public until 1804 thanks to the apartheid. The mosque's first imam, Abdullah Kadi Abdus Salaam, also known as Tuan Guru, was imprisoned on Robben Island for 14 years for political reasons. While he was there, he wrote an entire Quran from memory, which can be found at the Auwal Mosque. After religious freedom was granted in 1804, the Tana Baru Cemetery was built and is the final resting place of Tuan Guru and other imams from the mosque.

**ABOVE:** It is believed that after apartheid ended, the residents of Bo Kaap painted their houses in bright colours as a celebration of their freedom











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# TOKYO

**BENEATH THE BRIGHT LIGHTS, JAPAN'S CAPITAL IS AN ENDLESS TROVE OF CULTURAL TREASURES**

Tokyo is a city of impossible contrasts. An endless labyrinth of skyscrapers, bordered by mountain and sea; a neon, retrofuturist dream throttling past pockets of serenity – scattered with historic castles, temples and parks. One of the world's most populous cities, it is understandably among the hardest to truly penetrate. It is Japan at its least nuanced, a window dressing of stereotype, cloaked precariously over an incredibly rich culture, largely unknown to those beyond its bounds.

Among the city's best-known wards is Shinjuku; a microcosm of the city itself, home to its largest railway station, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building. Nestled within its streets is Kabukicho, Japan's grittiest and seediest neighbourhoods – though, tellingly, oft-called one of Asia's 'safest red-light districts'.

Marked by large, red gates, it is a surreal cluster of bars, eateries and restaurants, drenched in artificial light – most notably the Robot Restaurant, where food takes a back seat to spectacle. One of the world's most unmissable shows, Robot Restaurant is a celebration of Japanese stereotype turned up all the way to 11. A feast for the senses does not even begin to explain this bizarre, explosive battle between robot and dancer.

The adjacent area of Golden Gai presents a rare example of older Tokyo architecture, surviving both natural disasters and war. Engulfed on all sides by looming skyscrapers, it is a time capsule, filled with numerous tiny bars, frequented by the city's actors, artists and musicians looking for a peaceful escape from the metropolis beyond.

Offering an even quieter break is Shinjuku Gyoen, a stunning park with three main gardens. The first, in traditional Japanese style, features 1,500 cherry trees, two ponds joined by a small river, and a pavilion built to commemorate the royal wedding of Emperor Hirohito.

Elsewhere, a French garden mimics the splendour of Versailles with roses aplenty, while an English garden brings a touch of British charm to the Japanese archipelago. A curious greenhouse also boasts a tropical cocktail of flowers and plants.

The adjacent ward of Shibuya is home to the infamous Shibuya Crossing, an intersection outside the station where, at the turn of a light, seas of people flood across the road, heading towards homes, offices and shops. The area hosts an array of department stores, housed in skyscrapers with floors of restaurants. Shibuya is also considered to be a major driving force behind the country's fashion industry, with many new trends starting here.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Harajuku, an area made famous for its namesake 'Harajuku style' – a wacky hotchpotch of punk, cosplay, kawaii cute, bold colour and all things over-the-top. Beyond a thicket of trees, the spectacular Shinto shrine of Meiji-Jingu is dedicated to Emperor Meiji, whose ascendance stripped power away from the samurai class and thrust Japan into an era of modernisation.

One of Shibuya's more curious landmarks is Love Hotel Hill, where you'll find the capital's highest concentration of love hotels – frequented by couples who don't have anywhere else to spend time alone.

To the east is Tokyo's centre of ultraluxe chic, Ginza. Formerly a silver coin mint, the area was rebuilt after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Today it houses some of the city's most prestigious brands and malls. Topped by an iconic clock tower, Seiko's Wako building survived the intense firebombing of World War II, an architectural legacy that is today



At rush hour, Shibuya Crossing is engulfed by orderly waves of people

© Getty/davidf

## "HARAJUKU IS A WACKY HOTCHPOTCH OF ALL THINGS OVER-THE-TOP"



Tokyo Skytree offers panoramic views of the city that never ends

© Getty/ Saha Entertainment



Japan's national sport of sumo wrestling is a true spectacle, as two burly men attempt to out-muscle one another

© John Paul Antes





At night, Kabukicho comes alive, as a sea of neon lights (advertising all manner of businesses) battle for attention

## TOKYO

### Essential information

Buy a Japan Rail Pass before visiting to save money on travel.

### Best time to visit

*March to May (for cherry blossoms) or September to November (to avoid crowds)*

### Time zone

UTC+9

### Useful sites

[WWW.JAPAN.TRAVEL](http://WWW.JAPAN.TRAVEL)

[WWW.SUMO.OR.JP/EN](http://WWW.SUMO.OR.JP/EN)

[WWW.JAPAN-GUIDE.COM](http://WWW.JAPAN-GUIDE.COM)



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Japan's Noh theatre is among the oldest extant theatrical forms



©Getty/MANAN VATSAYANA/ Stringer

## THEATRE

Japanese culture varies greatly from region to region, but the capital of Tokyo is a brilliant gateway to some of the country's most beloved artistic heritage.

Among Japan's most recognisable forms of theatre is Kabuki, which originated during the Edo period, beginning in 1603. Performers don elaborate costumes and makeup, acting out historical dramas on intricate stages, with trapdoors and revolving platforms.

Bunraku theatre, meanwhile, sees a narrator tell a story, accompanied by a shamisen, acted out by puppets. The puppeteers, dressed all in black, animate not just the puppets' limbs, but facial expressions too – requiring a great deal of training and expertise.

Music is also central to Noh theatre, which was developed by 14th-century actor Kan'ami Kiyotsugu and his son Zeami. It is a minimalist, slow and ponderous reflection of themes, narrated by masked performers, often representing supernatural beings.

full of designer brands, a delectable tea salon and an art gallery. The ultramodern Tokyu Plaza, meanwhile, offers a bold contrast, with a kaleidoscopic entranceway – symbolising the country's world-class contemporary design.

A very different shopping experience can be had in Akihabara, a nexus of all things anime. Manga cafes sit alongside shops, overflowing with anime and video-game figurines, alongside electronic shops hawking retro Famicoms and assorted gadgets. Akihabara's 1,300-year-old Kanda-jinja Shinto shrine was famously where the notable rebel Taira no Masakado was enshrined in 940 and deified. Today, it is also represented by the mascot Nozomi Tojo, a shrine maiden from the anime *Love Live!*.

The nearby Ueno Park, originally part of the powerful Kaneiji Temple and one of Japan's earliest Western-style parks, features a long corridor of 1,000 cherry trees – prime hanami, or 'cherry blossom viewing', territory. The park's lotus-covered Shinobazu Pond, boasting an octagonal temple hall, is inspired by Lake Biwa – beneath the Kyoto temple that Kaneiji modelled itself after. Ueno also hosts an array of museums, including Tokyo National Museum and Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, as well as Ueno Zoo – the country's first.

In Sumida to the east, a bizarre, huge building rises as if on stilts. This modern behemoth, fashioned after a traditional storehouse, is home to the Edo-Tokyo Museum, a fascinating journey through the 400-year history of Japan's capital.

The atmospheric museum offers insight into the development of the city, formerly known as Edo, and the lives of those who inhabited it – examining Japanese architecture and the nation's cultural heritage.

The nearby (ironically small) Sumo Museum makes for a smooth introduction to the sport, which can be enjoyed at the Ryogoku sumo stadium, with a hearty helping of katsu curry and a dizzying drink of Chuhai. Tournaments are held during certain points of the year, and each day wrestlers do their best to throw their opponents to the ground, or push them out of the ring. By the end of the day, the atmosphere is electric, as pairs of Yokozuna duel to a cacophony of shrieking fans and camera flashes.

In the 17th century, sumo tournaments were held in the district of Asakusa, just to the north – then, the centre of entertainment and kabuki. Sensoji Temple is among the city's oldest and most magnificent Buddhist temples. It is preceded by the 200-metre (656-foot) shopping street, Nakamise, where vendors sell souvenirs and distinctive treats, such as amezaiku – elaborate, hand-crafted lollipops.

Just across the Sumida River is Tokyo Skytree, the world's second-tallest structure at 634 metres (2,080 feet). With two observation decks at 350 metres (1,148 feet) and 450 metres (1,476 feet), it makes for a stunning place to take in the city from up high. From here, Tokyo stretches out towards the horizon, a never-ending expanse of light and life.



 **BEIJING**

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**Essential information**

Carry your passport everywhere as there are frequent security checkpoints.

**Best time to visit**

*Winter to avoid the crowds, summer to avoid the worst of the smog*

**Time zone**

UTC+8

**Useful sites**

[WWW.DISCOVERCHINA.COM/BEIJING](http://WWW.DISCOVERCHINA.COM/BEIJING)  
[WWW.TRAVELCHINAGUIDE.COM/ATTRACTION/BEIJING](http://WWW.TRAVELCHINAGUIDE.COM/ATTRACTION/BEIJING)  
[HTTP://ENGLISH.VISITBEIJING.COM.CN](http://HTTP://ENGLISH.VISITBEIJING.COM.CN)



Spend a day exploring the many stunning buildings in the Forbidden City



©Getty/hxdyl

# BEIJING

**DO YOUR RESEARCH BEFORE YOU GO, BUT ENJOY A CITY LIKE NO OTHER**

**D**on't let this huge city intimidate you! Your trip to Beijing will take some planning because the city is so large, and a lot of sights are peppered around the place, but the reliable subway system will help you to get around. Note that you will have to put your bag through a scanner before entering the subway and you aren't supposed to take liquids on it.

It's likely that you'll want to visit the iconic Tiananmen Square on your trip to Beijing. The square itself is intimidatingly big and is situated to the north, separating Beijing from the Forbidden City. In the square you'll find the Monument to the People's Heroes, the Great Hall of the People, the National Museum of China and the Mausoleum of Mao Zedong.

The Forbidden City is a breathtaking palace complex that houses the palace museum and was formally the Chinese imperial palace from the Ming dynasty to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912. The Forbidden City was built between 1406 and 1420, and consists of 980 buildings and covers a huge 178 acres.

Other recommended sights in the city include the Temple of Heaven, which incorporates a group of some of Beijing's most sacred buildings:

Lama Temple (Yonghe Temple), the Beijing Temple of Confucius and Beijing Zoo. Lama Temple is one of Beijing's most attractive and best-preserved temples. On arrival, you'll be given a pack of incense that you can burn in one of the many shrines. The zoo is one of the oldest in China, dating back to 1906, and is home to an incredible array of animals including South China tigers, snow leopards, golden snub-nosed monkeys and pandas.

We know it isn't located in the city itself, but if you have made the trip to Beijing, you can't leave without also going to see the Great Wall of China. There are many organised tours from Beijing that will take you to the Mutianyu section

of the wall. Some tours include a tasty lunch, too, which is great if you fancy a little socialising with fellow travellers. In the summer, many, many, many Chinese tourists make the trip to the Great Wall, so if you don't want to be swept away by dense crowds, visit the wall in the winter. It will be bitterly cold, however you'll have a better experience without the crowds. It will be easier to shoot nice pictures too.

Before travelling to Beijing, it is worth noting a few things – don't expect there to be much English anywhere, toilets tend to be holes in the ground, and when they are not, locals tend to stand on the toilet seats – so don't let footprints on the seats surprise you.

Beijing feels huge, so make sure to plan your itinerary and routes



©Getty/Xuanyu Han



# SINGAPORE

FIND OUT WHAT MAKES THIS SMALL ASIAN ISLAND THE MEGACITY IT IS TODAY

From the moment you land in Singapore, you'll know exactly where you are. Changi Airport is frequently voted the world's best, with indoor gardens, a swimming pool, and more hotels, shops and restaurants than you can count. But that's only the start of your trip – Singapore has so much more in store.

The Downtown area is where you'll find Singapore's famous skyscrapers, waterfronts, and luxury hotels. Take a ride on the Singapore Flyer, one of the world's tallest ferris wheels. From here, you can glimpse awesome views of the city, the busy port, and the Formula 1 Street Circuit directly beneath you. Stroll past the Merlion (the city's irreverent symbol, a lion-headed fish that spouts water from its mouth) to the Marina Bay area. Here, you can shop until you drop, take an indoor sampan (boat ride) through the mall, or relax by the Marina Bay Sands' picture-perfect infinity pool.

Head inland a little to explore the colonial heart of Singapore, with its distinctly Victorian

architecture and British feel. Learn about the history of the city in the National Museum and Peranakan Museum. These explore Singapore's story, from the indigenous Malays who once inhabited the quiet island, to the distinctly international culture Singapore is known for in the 21st century. The most famous building in the Colonial District has to be Raffles Hotel – a late Victorian gem, all dressed in white. It looks like a quintessentially British hotel, but its founders were two Armenian brothers, reflecting just how diverse Singapore has always been. Raise a toast to them in the Long Bar – the place where the Singapore Sling cocktail was invented.

For a more spiritual experience, you can peer inside one of Singapore's many religious landmarks. From beautiful mosques to elaborate



**ABOVE:** Raffles Hotel is a remnant of Singapore's colonial past, best known for the Singapore Sling cocktail

Hindu temples, from classic cathedrals to towering Buddhist buildings, Singapore's sites of worship are just as diverse as its people. Visit Sri Mariamman, the city's oldest Hindu temple, to admire colourful decorations and to get to know Singapore's Tamil community. If you'd like to learn more about Chinese influence in Singapore, be sure to see the Buddha Tooth Relic temple, a gorgeous red and green building with pagodas that seem to stretch for eternity.

The diverse nature of its people means that Singapore's food scene is filled with all sorts of delights. Pay a visit to a hawker stall to sample noodles that are whipped up as quickly as one, two, three, or make a reservation at a Michelin-starred restaurant on the top floor of a skyscraper. There really is something for everyone in this city of contrasts.



**ABOVE:** The Arab Street area is the heart of the city's Muslim community, and is filled with gorgeous mosques and houses

## SINGAPORE

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### Essential information

Singapore is much more expensive than the countries that surround it, so be sure to budget accordingly.

#### Best time to visit

*February to April, for the dry season*

#### Time zone

UTC+8

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITSINGAPORE.COM/EN](http://WWW.VISITSINGAPORE.COM/EN)

[WWW.STB.GOV.SG/CONTENT/STB/EN.HTML](http://WWW.STB.GOV.SG/CONTENT/STB/EN.HTML)

[WWW.MARINABAYSANDS.COM](http://WWW.MARINABAYSANDS.COM)



Marina Bay Sands and the Gardens by the Bay define Downtown's skyline





# HONG KONG

FROM THE BUSY MARKETS OF KOWLOON TO THE SERENITY OF LANTAU ISLAND, HONG KONG IS FULL OF SURPRISES

Since the First Opium War of 1842, Hong Kong has remained a land of promise and adventure, first as a vibrant British trading post, and now a Chinese special administrative region. At its heart, it is a vibrant megacity, with a distinct architectural heritage immortalised by virtually every fictional cyberpunk metropolis – from *Blade Runner* to *Ghost in the Shell*.

Its distinctive skyline forms a corridor along southern Kowloon's Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade, where a 44-metre (144-foot) high clock tower memorialises the region's colonial past, beside the Avenue of Stars, paying tribute to the giants of Hong Kong cinema. Further inland, Nathan Road forms the spine of an eclectic mish-mash of high-end luxury stores, enthusiastic restaurateurs, Bollywood-themed merchandise hawkers and Shanghainese tailors.

In the adjacent area of Yau Ma Tei is Temple Street, home not only to a Tin Hau temple, but the Night Market, a sprawling assortment of vendors and traders, featured in many a film. Street food is in no short supply, with piping-hot

noodles and fresh seafood on hand to rejuvenate weary shoppers for a second wind of haggling.

Just north, in what was once the triad heartland of Mong Kok is the Ladies' Market, awash with inexpensive clothes for both women and men, as well as gadgets, gizmos and all manner of delightful knick-knacks. While the nearby Tung Choi Street features an array of Chinese pubs, on the opposite side of Victoria Harbour, Wan Chai is marked by its distinct colonial-style bars – a short trip from the upmarket restaurants, boutique art galleries and antique shops tucked along the historic streets of SoHo.

The city's most exclusive postcode, The Peak, is aptly named, whether enjoyed aboard the charming Peak Tram (which has run since 1888) or from 428 metres (1,404 feet) above sea level atop Peak Tower. The area offers a vantage point to reflect on the island's fascinating history.

However, there is much more to Hong Kong than just the city. In the east and northeast, New Territories is Hong Kong UNESCO Global

Geopark, a marvel of the natural world, with hexagonal and twisted volcanic columns crawling upwards, alongside a coastline of volcanic rock.

At Central Star Ferry Pier, visitors can catch a ride out to Hong Kong's southern Islands District. From the hiking trails, beach barbecues and rolling hills of Lamma Island to the bun-snatching festival of the tiny Cheung Chau, each of these laid-back isles is a testament to Hong Kong's natural beauty and time-honoured traditions.

Hidden within the verdant mountains of Hong Kong's largest outlying island, Lantau, Po Lin Monastery is given away by a curious landmark – the enormous 34-metre (112-foot) tall, bronze 'Big Buddha'. A pilgrimage site for Buddhists across Asia, the statue sits atop 268 steps, with a peaceful garden and a vegetarian restaurant to boot. Elsewhere, 38 monuments are aligned in an infinity pattern, adorned with the Heart Sutra in Chinese calligraphy – forming Wisdom Path. On the western side of the island is Tai O Fishing Village, a rare collection of traditional stilt houses, with a fish market, cafés and restaurants.

**HONG KONG**

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### Essential information

The pre-paid Octopus card is accepted by public transport, grocery stores and vending machines alike.

### Best time to visit

*October to December (for dry, cool weather), or January to February (to enjoy Chinese New Year)*

### Time zone

UTC+8

### Useful sites

[WWW.DISCOVERHONGKONG.COM](http://WWW.DISCOVERHONGKONG.COM)  
[WWW.SKYBIRD.COM.HK](http://WWW.SKYBIRD.COM.HK)  
[WWW.TAR.GOV.HK/ENG/ABOUT/INDEX.HTML](http://WWW.TAR.GOV.HK/ENG/ABOUT/INDEX.HTML)



Victoria Harbour, originally known as 'Fragrant Harbour', has long remained the city's lifeline





## DELHI

## Essential information

Take toilet paper everywhere you go, and only drink bottled water or use water purification tablets.

## Best time to visit

*October to March*

## Time zone

UTC+5:30



## Useful sites

[WWW.DELHITOURISM.GOV.IN](http://WWW.DELHITOURISM.GOV.IN)

[WWW.DELHITOURISM.COM/TOURIST-OFFICE.HTML](http://WWW.DELHITOURISM.COM/TOURIST-OFFICE.HTML)

[WWW.INDIAODYSSEYTOURS.COM](http://WWW.INDIAODYSSEYTOURS.COM)

Once you get used to the noise and chaos of Delhi, it has a certain charm about it

# DELHI

INDIA'S BUSTLING CAPITAL CITY WILL CERTAINLY AWAKEN YOUR SENSES

When you visit northern India's urban district of Delhi, you'll find yourself in one of the most populated cities in the country, so prepare yourself for crowds! Divided into two parts – Old Delhi and the national capital territory of New Delhi – the city is a cultural melting pot, with locals and migrants from all over the country living side by side. Although Hindi is the most common language spoken in Delhi, many locals speak English.

Book accommodation before you arrive, as the chaos and volume of people won't make it easy for you to wander around looking for a temporary dwelling. Whether you want to be treated like a maharajah in a five-star boutique hotel, or experience a more modest stay in a backpacker's hostel, there is something to suit all budgets and requirements in Delhi.

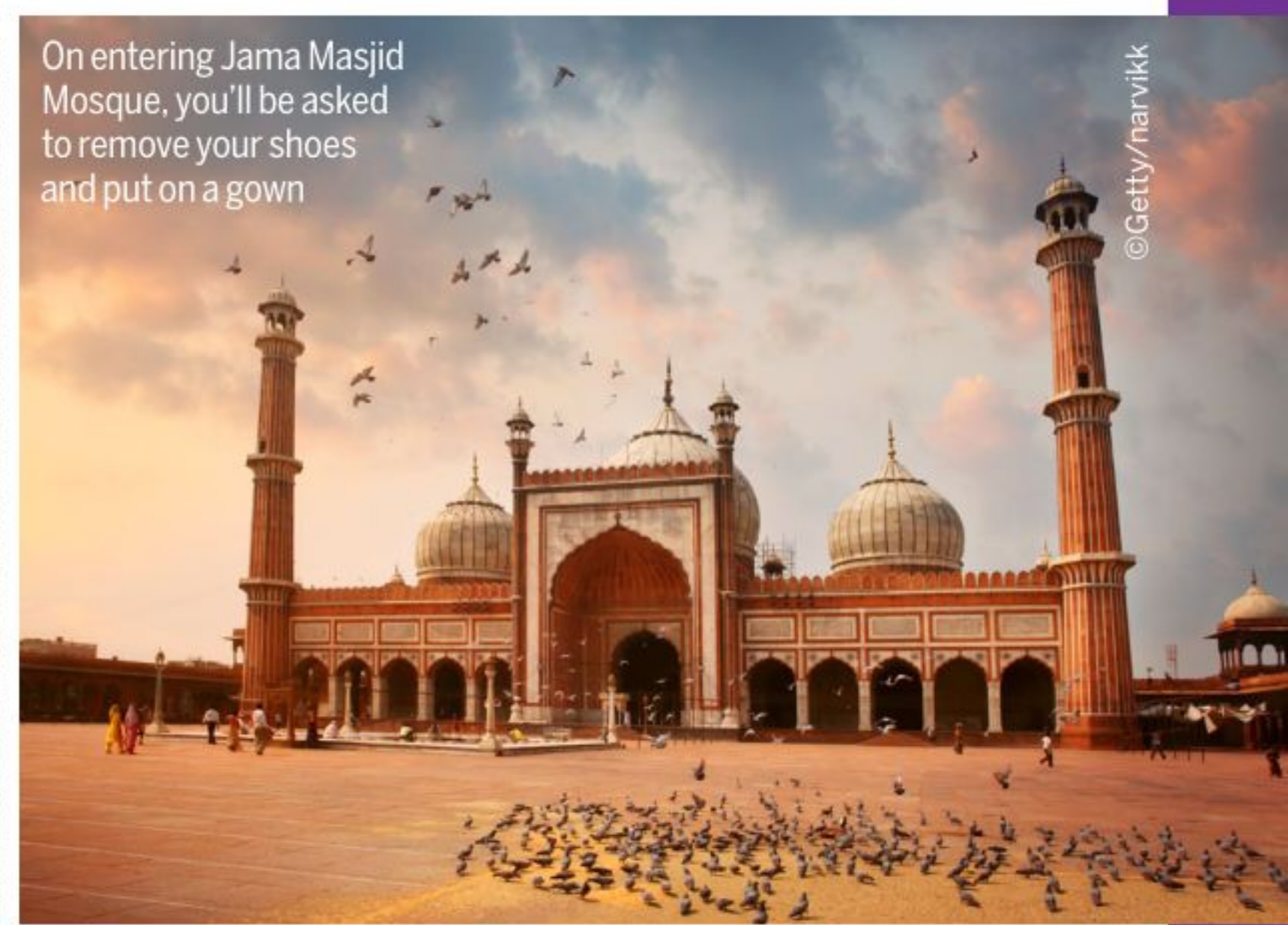
Every neighbourhood is teeming with tuk tuks, rickshaws, scooters and bicycles, whizzing around you from all directions and creating a constant beeping of horns. Among the hustle and bustle, you're guaranteed to stumble across a market or two, but the most famous is Chandni Chowk, which sells anything from silver jewellery and colourful scarves to nuts and spices piled high. Remember to haggle! Keep your camera or phone well charged, because there are so

many sights to capture, from colourful flower stalls and vivid saris, to cows roaming around and precariously placed power cables above your head! You'll find people working away behind sewing machines in the street; men having their beards shaved at the side of the road; and of course, hawkers trying to sell you things.

In contrast to the more undeveloped neighbourhoods of Old and New Delhi, the lively business and financial hub of Connaught Place provides a welcome change of scenery. With an abundance of shops selling high-end brands, as well as markets, bars and restaurants, it's a great place to shop for gifts or relax with a chai or beer. Close to the Delhi Metro station, which covers more than 340 kilometres (200 miles), there are also plenty of rickshaws nearby if your feet need a break. Agree on a price before getting into a tuk tuk or rickshaw.

Make sure you explore India's rich cultural heritage by visiting Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in the country, capable of accommodating 25,000 people. Walking across the elevated courtyard is a breathtaking experience. You'll want perhaps an hour to admire the impressive architecture and stunning view of the city. Just one kilometre (around half a mile) from Jama Masjid is another sight to

On entering Jama Masjid Mosque, you'll be asked to remove your shoes and put on a gown



behold: the Red Fort, Delhi's largest monument. With its various buildings and palaces, make sure you pack plenty of water and again be prepared for lots of walking.

If it's your first trip to India, expect to experience a degree of culture shock. In addition to the buzz of the city, there are sights that will sadden you, from children begging to families trawling through rubbish. Keep your mind open and while acknowledging what's in front of you, embrace everything Delhi has to offer, because you'll never visit anywhere else like it.



Colourful fishing boats contrast with the starkness of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link



 **MUMBAI**

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**Essential information**

Only use Mumbai's metered taxis. If you get into an unmetered one, negotiate the price first.

**Best time to visit**  
*October to March*

**Time zone**  
UTC+5:30

**Useful sites**  
[WWW.MUMBAI.ORG.UK](http://WWW.MUMBAI.ORG.UK)  
[WWW.GRANDMUMBAI.COM](http://WWW.GRANDMUMBAI.COM)  
[WWW.MUMBAIMAGIC.COM](http://WWW.MUMBAIMAGIC.COM)



# MUMBAI

**DISCOVER THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SMELLS OF INDIA'S MOST VIBRANT CITY**

There's nowhere else in the world quite like Mumbai. Nowhere else will you find so many 'opposites' all under the roof of a single city: heritage buildings meet modern skyscrapers; expensive homes stand tall next to sprawling slums; stray dogs roam below exotic birds; servants work alongside prosperous business people. Mumbai is a unique place.

Arriving by train, you'll immediately be greeted by one of Mumbai's most iconic landmarks: the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. If you're going to visit any train station in India – and no trip to the country is complete without doing so – this UNESCO World Heritage Site is the one to choose. Located in the Fort precinct of Mumbai, it showcases High Victorian Gothic as well as Indian architecture, and is the perfect cultural blend of Indian and colonial designs.

There are reminders of the British Raj and colonial influences everywhere you look in Mumbai. Even the city's most recognisable monument, the Gateway of India, was built to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. Completed in 1924 and located in the Apollo Bunder area of south Mumbai, the waterfront arch stands tall at



Mumbai's bustling streets are not for the faint of heart

©Getty/SJPalkar

©Getty/Rajat Rangdal / EyeEm





The Gateway of India stands tall in the harbour and is Mumbai's most recognisable monument

©Getty/Muni Yogeshwaran



## EXPERIENCE BOLLYWOOD

Before you leave the incredible city of Mumbai altogether, you'll want to sample a little bit of Bollywood in all its glory! And where better to enjoy the song-and-dance fusion than in its birthplace?

The heart of the Bollywood film industry and where it all began, there are so many thrilling Bollywood experiences to be had in Mumbai. If you're short on time, simply watching a movie at the cinema is exciting enough, and there are plenty of movie theatres to choose from in the city. The audience participation may not be something you're used to, but makes for a fantastic experience, as people shout at the screen, all in good spirits.

If you do have more time, sign up for a tour of one of the movie studios, where you might even get to meet some of the cast and crew, and watch a movie being filmed. You'll learn a bit about the history of Bollywood too, and sometimes even get shown around the city. Bollywood Tours is a popular tour company. (<http://bollywoodtours.in>).

26 metres (85 feet) high and overlooks the harbour, welcoming visitors as they approach the southern part of the city by boat. It's a sight you wouldn't want to miss when in Mumbai. Step through the Gateway and you'll be greeted by commemorative statues of important Indian figures, street vendors and even more architectural marvels, including the Taj Mahal Palace – one of India's finest hotels. Offering both luxury and a taste of history, it's directly opposite the Gateway and well worth taking a peek inside.

The Gateway is also the perfect place from which to explore the ancient, rock-cut Elephanta Caves, since its surrounding jetties offer ferry trips to Elephanta Island just ten kilometres (six miles) away, where the caves are located. Becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, it is believed by many that the cave temples date back to the fifth century CE. The five Hindu caves and two Buddhist ones house some impressive sculptures, some of which are now in ruins. Unfortunately it's not possible to stay on the forest-covered island overnight, but a day trip is all you need to admire the heritage on display.

Before leaving south Mumbai, be sure to check out the heritage and art district of Kala Ghoda in downtown Mumbai. The crescent-shaped precinct houses art galleries, heritage buildings, museums and much more. Whether you choose to explore the buildings themselves, or browse the pavement art stalls and creative spaces as you pass through, this compelling cultural hub with its hip cafes and popular restaurants is a welcome contrast to the hustle and bustle of the rest of the city.

Further up in central Mumbai is the magnificent Haji Ali Dargah, which is both a mosque and a tomb. Built in 1431 in memory of wealthy Muslim merchant Sayed Peer Haji

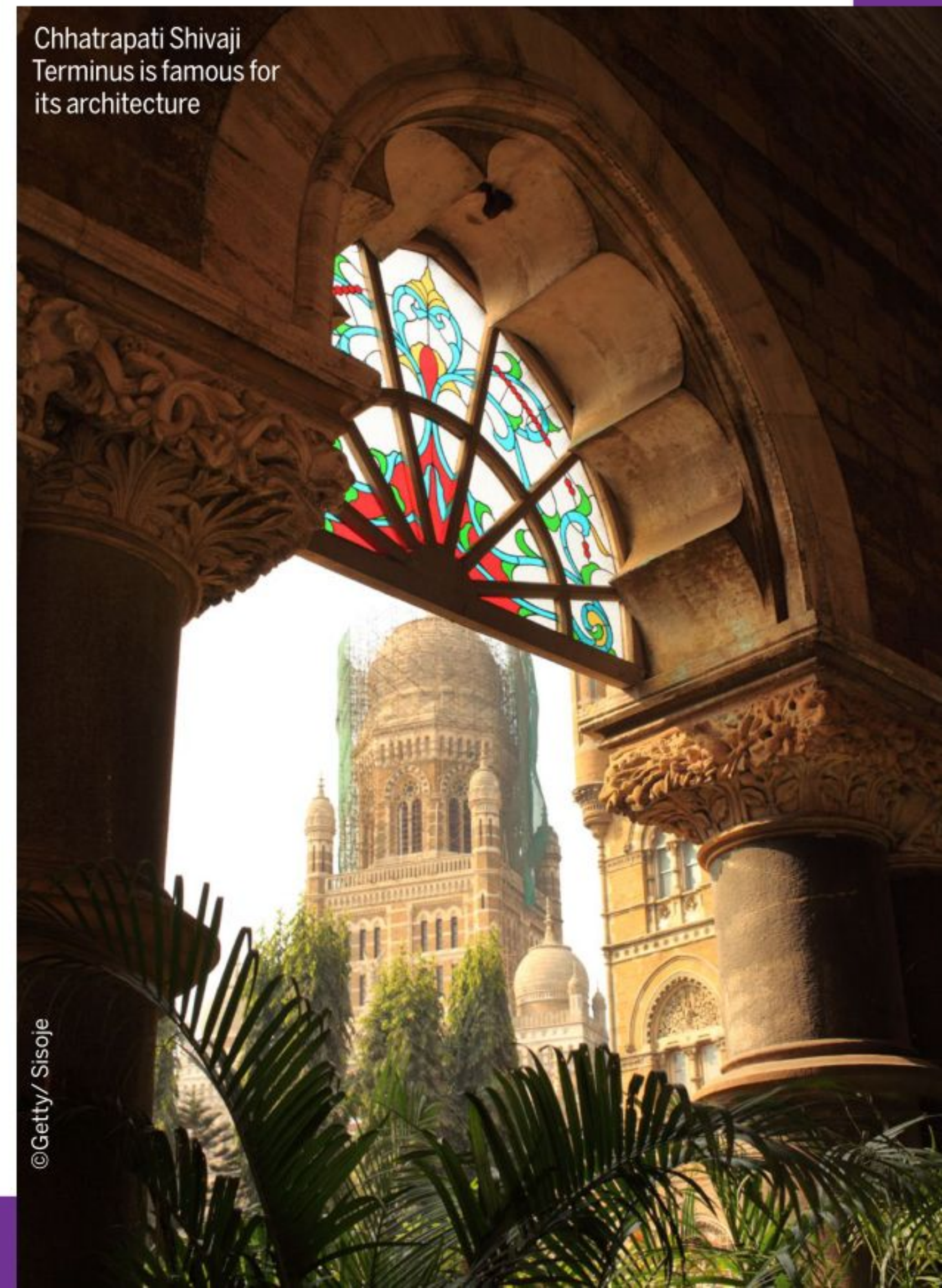
Ali Shah Bukhari, who made an important pilgrimage to Mecca, the landmark is located on an islet off the coast of Worli, and can only be accessed via a walkway during low tide.

Now you're spoilt for choice when it comes to bazaars to mooch around in Mumbai, but if you only have time for one, make sure it's Chor Bazaar. Literally meaning 'thieves' market', it got its name after some of Queen Victoria's belongings went missing when one of her ships docked in the city's harbour. Supposedly they were later found for sale in the bazaar. Located near Bhendi Bazaar in south Mumbai, you'll find everything from vintage clocks to antique furniture. And if you believe the legend, perhaps you'll even locate some of your own belongings there should anything go missing while you're in the city!

If you want to escape the noise and grime of the city's bazaars, hawkers and general chaos, we recommend you either head to the densely forested Sanjay Gandhi National Park, located between the suburbs of Mumbai and Thane, or make your way to Juhu Beach, north of the city centre. The national park will spoil you with an abundance of flora and fauna – a welcome contrast to the polluted air of the city – including deer and leopards, as well as various reptiles and butterflies. On the other hand, the popular beach destination in affluent Juhu is perfect for unwinding and watching the Sun set over the Arabian Sea with locals and tourists alike. Here you can sample Mumbai-style street food at the food court, and enjoy entertainment from dancing monkeys to impressive acrobats.

The hardest thing about visiting Mumbai will be fitting everything in. Make an itinerary before you go, and prioritise what you want to see and do. And whatever you don't have time for will have to wait 'til next time!

Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus is famous for its architecture



©Getty/Sisoje



Kyoto is arguably at its prettiest in the springtime, when the cherry blossom blooms



©Getty/ Sean Pavone

## KYOTO

### Essential information

Visit Gion in the early evening (6pm onwards) to catch a glimpse of a geisha as she rushes from her lodgings to her evening's performance.

#### Best time to visit

*Late March to early April for the sakura (cherry blossoms)*

#### Time zone

UTC+9

#### Useful sites

[HTTPS://KYOTO.TRAVEL/EN](https://kyoto.travel/en)

[WWW.INSIDEKYOTO.COM](http://www.insidekyoto.com)

[WWW.JAPAN-GUIDE.COM/E/E2158.HTML](http://www.japan-guide.com/E/E2158.HTML)



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# KYOTO

## THERE ARE A MILLION REASONS TO VISIT JAPAN'S ANCIENT CAPITAL – GEISHAS ARE ONLY ONE OF THEM

When you think of Japan, do you think of modern megacities or ancient temples? Kyoto, Japan's former capital, is both. Start your journey at Kyoto Station and walk across the road to the Kyoto Tower, which offers panoramic views of the city.

Next, come down from your lofty heights to experience the ancient charm of the city. Kyoto is known for its beautiful religious architecture, with so many fascinating temples to explore. In the south of the city, visit Fushimi Inari-taisha,

which features thousands of red torii gates leading up a mountain. You'll be out of breath by the time you reach the summit, and will only have it taken away again by the mystical atmosphere of the inner shrine.

Head north to visit Tofuku-ji Temple, which is one of the five great Zen temples of Kyoto. West of Tofuku-ji is To-ji Temple, which features a five-storey wooden pagoda, and a garden with stepping stones laid across a koi-filled pond.

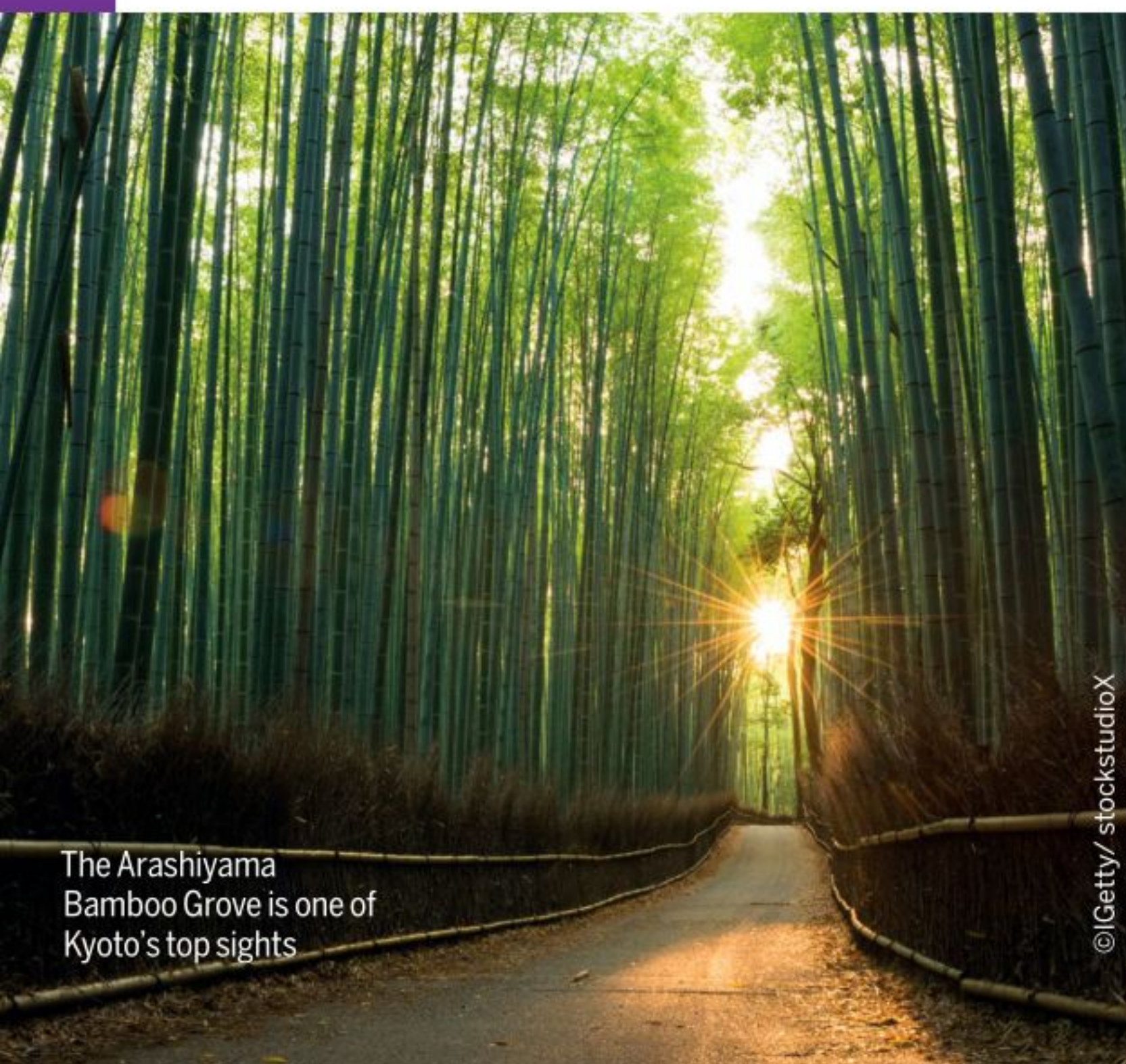
At the northern end of Kyoto is the mesmerising Kinkaku-ji, the recently restored 'Golden Temple'. The temple appears to float over a tranquil pond, which reflects the gilded pavilion's image. Not too far away from here is a bamboo forest, home to mischievous monkeys and towering bamboo plants.

As the capital of Japan for more than 1,000 years, you'll find Kyoto has plenty of history. Visit Nijo Castle to see how a proper Japanese castle is constructed, with formidable moats and walls guarding an imposing wooden structure. At Nijo, you get two palaces for the price of one, as both the Ninomaru Palace and the residential Honmaru Palace can be seen. The samurais who built Nijo wanted all visitors to know who

was boss, painting tigers in every room of the Ninomaru Palace to intimidate anyone who dared question their power.

The samurais frequently clashed with the Japanese Emperor, who lived in the Imperial Palace just a kilometre (0.6 miles) away. The opulent Imperial Palace is set in the Kyoto Gyoen gardens, surrounded by shrines and palaces still of great significance to the Japanese royal family today. The Imperial Palace itself is a vision of red, white and gold, designed to reflect the glory and wealth of the Emperor. You'll get your dose of Japanese history here, but the gardens and tea pavilions are also well worth exploring when you need a break from political intrigues.

No visit to Kyoto is complete without a visit to Gion, the entertainment district. Here, you'll find geisha performing traditional tea ceremonies and dances, dressed in beautiful kimonos and wearing distinctive white-face makeup. Be sure to buy a ticket to the show in advance, as you won't want to miss it. Cross over the Kamo River to enjoy a drink on Ponto-cho, Kyoto's (sometimes rowdy) nightlife centre. End your day sitting on the Kamo River banks, just as the locals do, and watch the Sun set on this eternally golden city.



The Arashiyama Bamboo Grove is one of Kyoto's top sights

©Getty/ stockstudioX



# BANGKOK

## SHOWCASING THAILAND'S RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE ALONGSIDE ITS LIVELY MODERN INFLUENCES

Often visited as a brief stopover before heading north to the jungles or south to the islands, Bangkok should not be overlooked as a destination in its own right. The city has a lot to offer, from food and entertainment to culture and spirituality, and it's worth spending at least a few days there before rushing off to the more serene locations in Thailand.

There's a broad range of accommodation in Bangkok, so you can stay in a boutique hotel on the river or a budget hostel. And even if you haven't pre-booked your accommodation, you'll easily find somewhere to rest your head for the night, especially on Khao San Road. Whether you stay here or somewhere less chaotic, this infamous backpacker's street is worth visiting both in the daytime and evening. There are market stalls, street food, bars, restaurants... you name it, it's got it.

Less than a half-hour walk from the bustling Khao San Road is one of the most iconic places to visit in Bangkok: the Grand Palace, a complex of beautiful buildings with stunning architecture and intricate detail. Also within the complex is Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of the Emerald Buddha),

which is truly a sight to behold. Entry into the complex will cost around £12 (\$16), and you can book an audio guide or an official guide for an additional small fee. Remember to dress respectfully, keeping arms, legs and feet as covered up as possible

Just a ten-minute walk south of the Grand Palace, on Rattanakosin Island, is Wat Pho (the Temple of the Reclining Buddha), which is home to the largest collection of Buddha images in Thailand, in addition to the 46-metre (150-foot) long reclining Buddha. The entrance fee is just £5 (\$6.50) and the same dress code applies. Make sure you get a traditional Thai massage here before you leave, as it's considered the leading school of massage in Thailand. Opposite Wat Pho is Wat Arun, one of the most beautiful temples in the city. Its colourfully decorated spires and riverside location make it look particularly stunning at sunset

The Chatuchak Weekend Market is an indoor and outdoor market, and by far the largest in



Taste some local delicacies, including chicken in banana leaves, at the Khao San Road street food market

the country. At 35 acres, it is mind-blowingly huge, and sells everything from local food and souvenirs to clothing and even animals. Wear comfy shoes, take plenty of bottled water, and give yourself a few hours to grab some bargains.

There are so many more temples, markets, museums and other incredible things to see and do in Bangkok, you'll need to prioritise and make a plan before you get there. Just make sure you embrace the chaos, take in the culture, and remember you can escape the hustle and bustle at any time by going on a river cruise or visiting one of the floating markets.

## "GIVE YOURSELF A FEW HOURS TO GRAB SOME BARGAINS"



### BANGKOK

#### Essential information

Beware of tuk tuk scammers telling you temples are closed, and taking you somewhere else!

#### Best time to visit

November to February

#### Time zone

UTC+7

#### Useful sites

[WWW.BANGKOK.COM](http://WWW.BANGKOK.COM)

[WWW.ROYALGRANDPALACE.TH/EN/HOME](http://WWW.ROYALGRANDPALACE.TH/EN/HOME)

[BANGKOKFORVISITORS.COM](http://BANGKOKFORVISITORS.COM)



Wat Arun is particularly beautiful at sunset, so make sure you walk along the river one evening



**Essential information**

Be sure to visit the Petronas Towers at sunset to watch Kuala Lumpur transform from day into night.

**Best time to visit**

*December to February for the driest weather*

**Time zone**

UTC+8

**Useful sites**

[WWW.VISITKL.GOV.MY/VISITKL.V2](http://WWW.VISITKL.GOV.MY/VISITKL.V2)

[WWW.KUALA-LUMPUR.WS](http://WWW.KUALA-LUMPUR.WS)

[WWW.WONDERFULMALAYSIA.COM/KUALA-LUMPUR-CITY-MALAYSIA.HTM](http://WWW.WONDERFULMALAYSIA.COM/KUALA-LUMPUR-CITY-MALAYSIA.HTM)



©Getty/Rat0007

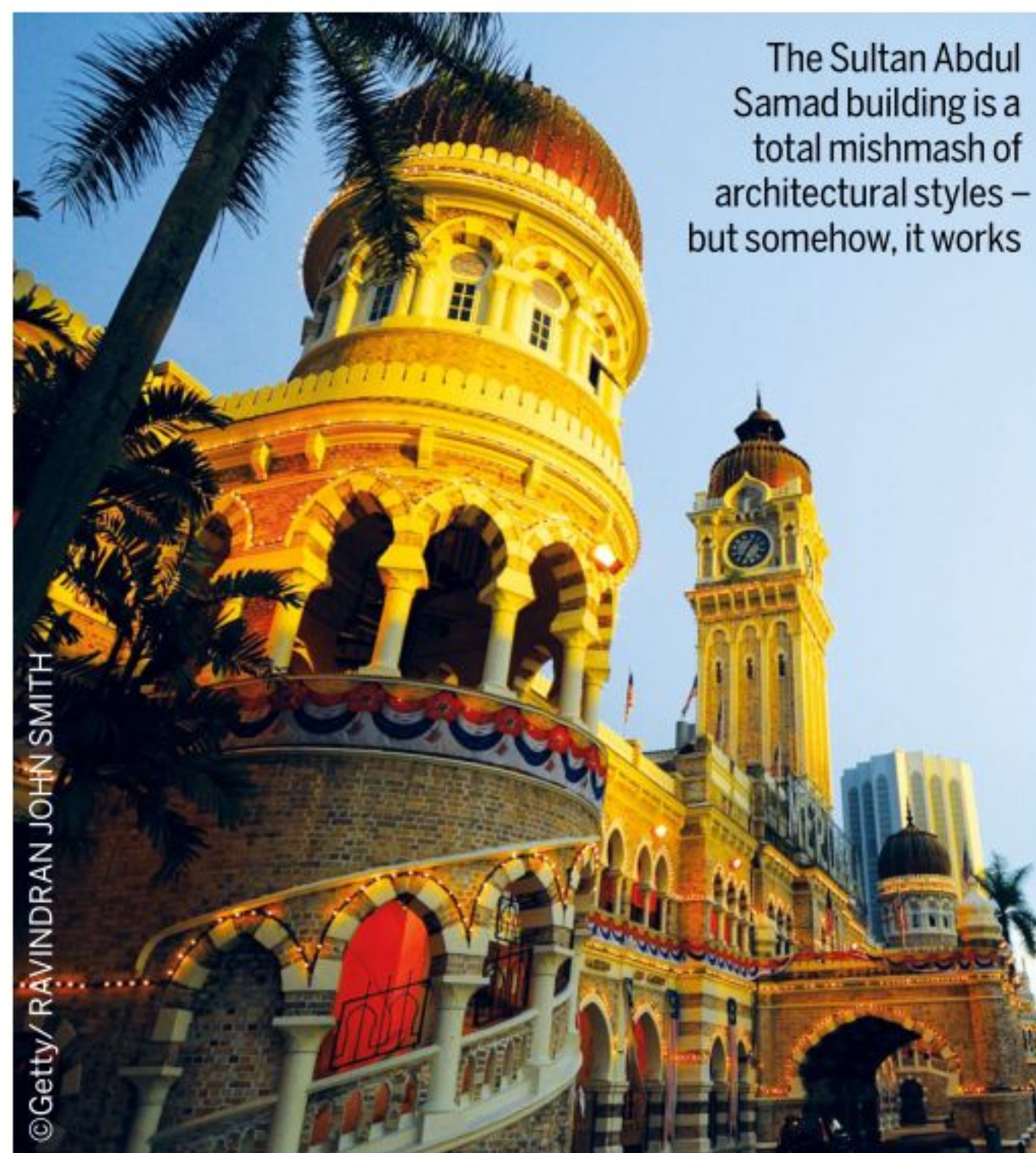
KLCC is the best place to start any Kuala Lumpur trip, featuring a giant park, a shopping mall, and of course the Petronas Towers

# KUALA LUMPUR

**VISIT THE MALAYSIAN CAPITAL FOR TOWERING SKYSCRAPERS, BUSTLING MARKETS AND EXPANSIVE GARDENS**

As one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, there's plenty of exciting things going on in Kuala Lumpur (affectionately known as KL). Begin your tour in the central hub of KLCC (city centre). You'll find shiny glass office buildings at the edge of a huge park, with water features that sparkle in the sunshine. For a break from the heat, head inside the Suria shopping mall, one of the largest in Malaysia. Browse high-end shops before going to the lobby of the Petronas Towers – the tallest twin towers in the world. Stop at the 41st floor to cross the iconic skybridge, before riding the lifts up to the dizzying heights of the 86th floor to view KL from the clouds.

Travel back in time by visiting Kuala Lumpur's old heart. Get off the train at Kuala Lumpur's main station, a Mughal-inspired building built by the British, who occupied Malaysia throughout the 19th century until just after World War II. A short walk away is Merdeka Square. See how the British colonialists lived the high life in the Royal Selangor Club, then cross the square to the Sultan Abdul Samad building, a beautiful and intricate place that was originally the seat of British government in Malaysia.



The Sultan Abdul Samad building is a total mishmash of architectural styles – but somehow, it works

©Getty/RAVINDRAN JOHN SMITH

Just behind the Sultan Abdul Samad building is the Jamek Mosque, another British construction. It's a fusion of Islamic architectural styles, and looks quite quirky as it is dwarfed by the skyscrapers that surround it. If you'd like to see a thoroughly modern mosque that suits KL's forward-thinking spirit, visit the National Mosque

of Malaysia nestled in the Perdana Gardens. But KL is a true melting pot of cultures, so as well as Malay Muslims, you'll find the descendants of Indian and Chinese immigrants too. Head to Chinatown, where you'll find the vibrant Petaling Street Market. Haggle for a bargain on electronics, watches, clothes, jewellery and accessories. Stay in a guesthouse for a more authentic experience, and be sure to eat noodles at one of the hawker stalls for a proper Malaysian slap-up meal.

A couple of stops away is Brickfields, the home of Little India – it's conveniently located next to KL Sentral station. Here you can sample a spicy curry or buy colourful fabrics, and you'll find a slice of southern India right here in KL. If you take a train to Batu Caves, in the forested suburbs north of KL, you'll see the third biggest Hindu statue ever – a giant, golden representation of war god Murugan. Inside the caves, you'll learn all about the stories in the Ramayana. Don't worry about reading big blocks of text, though – it's all told by hundreds of colourful statues.

With so much to see and do, you definitely won't want to miss Kuala Lumpur off your Southeast Asia itinerary.



# SEOUL

**SOUTH KOREA'S CAPITAL IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST THE SUM OF ITS VARIOUS PARTS**

As the Sun sets over the forested mountains, Seoul's lights twinkle into a modern mosaic. South Korea's capital is a true metropolis, throttling forwards at the speed of light, with one foot placed carefully in the past.

The crowded shopping district of Myeong-dong is perhaps quintessential Seoul – a flutter of K-Pop blasting from fluorescent shops, where hawkers tout cutting-edge face masks, and Korean barbeques stack up high in busy towers, jostling for position among the pork cutlet, chicken galbi and noodle houses.

Elsewhere, in a peaceful corner of Yongsan District, The Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art harbours one of the country's finest collections. From thought-provoking installations by Anish Kapoor to masterpieces of traditional Korean art and pottery, and Francis Bacon paintings to ancient Buddhist iconography, the museum is a journey across the fabric of human imagination.

The district is also home to the War Memorial of Korea, immortalising the country's history of conflict – from the prehistoric era to the Korean War. Beyond the thoughtful memorial hall, it features an educational array of exhibits, contextualising the nature of war.

However, the city's most magnificent museum is undoubtedly the National Museum of Korea, 1.5 kilometres (one mile) away – a vast, sprawling complex, with permanent exhibitions unveiling the country's storied past with poise and grace. The phenomenally curated museum combines an awe-inspiring collection of antiquities and artwork with fascinating videos and exhibits,



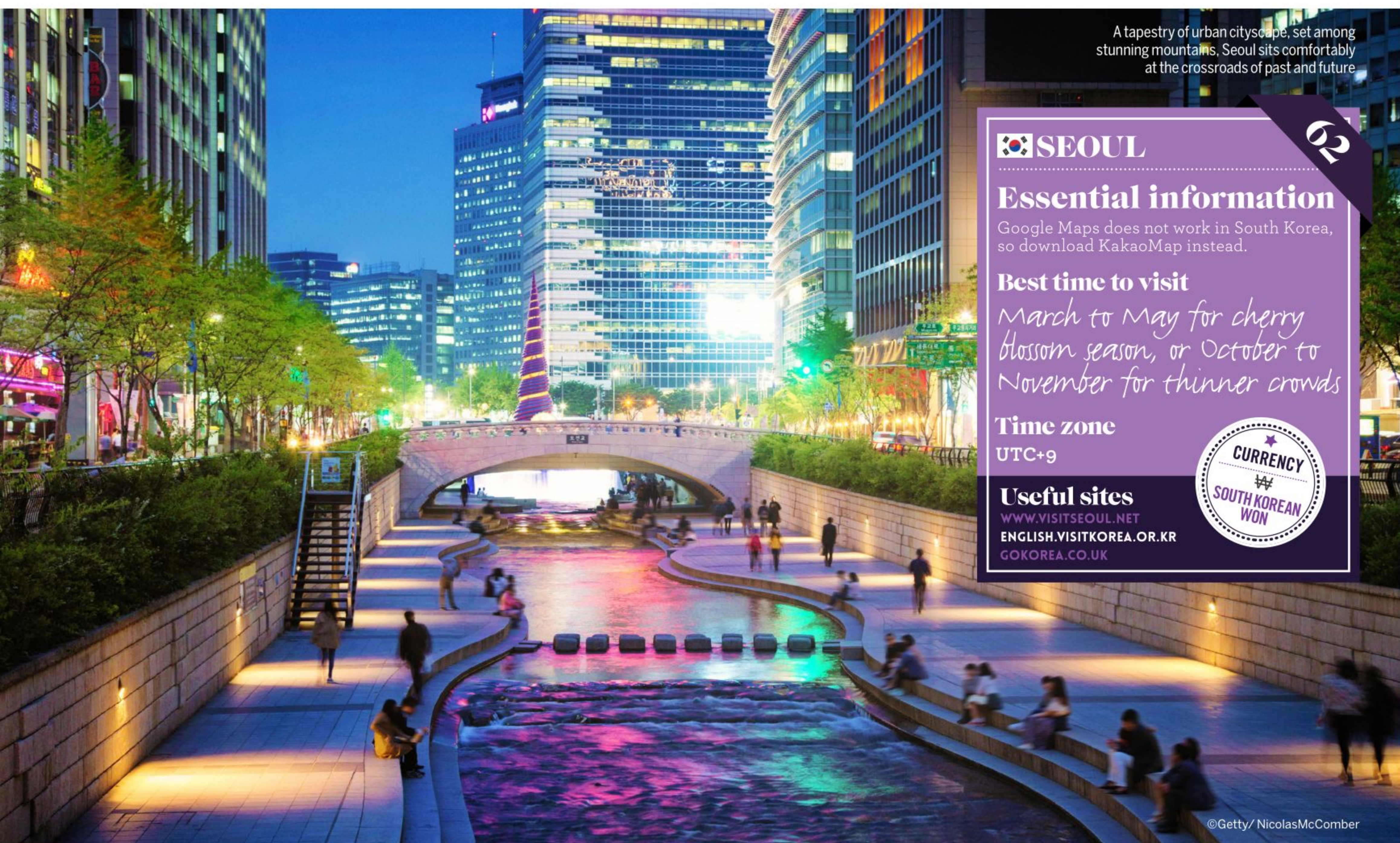
©Mete Basar BAYPINAR / Alamy

**ABOVE:** Myeong-dong is all about the two big s words: shopping and street food

opening a window into the very soul of Korea. Meanwhile, the 14th-century Gyeongbokgung Palace offers a touch of physicality to the proceedings. The largest of Seoul's five palaces, it presides over a stunning complex, designed symmetrically to allow the mountains of Inwangsan and Bugaksan to be seen from the entire complex. Its Confucian architect designed the site to symbolise not majestic extravagance, but humble virtue.

A short walk away is Bukchon Hanok Village, which takes visitors on a whimsical trip back in time 600 years, to the 'North Village' – a cluster of hundreds of hanok, or traditional Korean guesthouses. Tiled roofs coalesce over elaborate wooden doors and patterned walls, which today house cultural centres, restaurants and the residents themselves.

With so many sights to take in, the only way to truly digest it all is from afar, with a trip up Namsan Mountain, by foot or by cable car. Rising from the heart of the city, the mountain features an array of pleasant hikes, capped by the 235-metre (777-foot) N Seoul Tower, which is complete with observation decks, and even a revolving restaurant.



A tapestry of urban cityscape, set among stunning mountains, Seoul sits comfortably at the crossroads of past and future

## SEOUL

### Essential information

Google Maps does not work in South Korea, so download KakaoMap instead.

### Best time to visit

*March to May for cherry blossom season, or October to November for thinner crowds*

### Time zone

UTC+9

### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITSEOUL.NET](http://WWW.VISITSEOUL.NET)  
[ENGLISH.VISITKOREA.OR.KR](http://ENGLISH.VISITKOREA.OR.KR)  
[GOKOREA.CO.UK](http://GOKOREA.CO.UK)





The homestay makes it easy for guests to enjoy a concise, holistic experience of Chiang Mai's main attractions

## CHIANG MAI

### Essential information

When visiting hill tribes, be sure to choose an ethical tour operator.

#### Best time to visit

*October to February (for cool, dry weather) or April to October (to avoid the crowds)*

#### Time zone

UTC+7

#### Useful sites

[WWW.TOURISMTHAILAND.ORG](http://WWW.TOURISMTHAILAND.ORG)

[WWW.TRAVELHUBCHIANGMAI.COM](http://WWW.TRAVELHUBCHIANGMAI.COM)

[WWW.GUESTHOUSE-CHIANGMAI.COM](http://WWW.GUESTHOUSE-CHIANGMAI.COM)



# CHIANG MAI

THAILAND'S CHIANG MAI IS A CELEBRATION OF TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Set amid the mountains and rainforests of northern Thailand, the coolest part of the country, literally and figuratively, is Chiang Mai. Once the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, which ruled northern Thailand for half a millennium, it is today the country's second-largest city, sitting along the border of Myanmar, surrounded by hill tribe villages.

At its heart is the Old Town, a striking example of traditional Thai architecture, contained within a moat and a rare example of extant city walls. The sleepy centre makes for remarkable walking, through the eastern Tapae Gate and into Wat Chiang Man, the city's oldest Buddhist temple – built in 1296 by the first Lanna king, Mangrai. A classic example of Lanna architecture, it boasts a chedi, or stupa, held up by an elaborate group of stoic elephant buttresses.

One of the city's most beautiful temples is Wat Phra Singh, 'The Temple of the Lion Buddha', hosting hundreds of monks and novices. The 14th-century monastery's assembly hall makes a lavish display of power – with a teak exterior, adorned with ornamental accoutrements in gold and ochre. Inside, walls feature elegant murals, depicting local and Buddhist folklore, leading

up to a rear wall of red lacquer and gold leaf. Here sits the highly venerated Phra Singh Lion Buddha, which is paraded through the city every April during the Thai New Year festival, Songkran, when revellers sprinkle it with water.

Though the nearby Wat Chedi Luang is not the largest temple in the area, it boasts a magnificent chedi (pagoda), which stood as Chiang Mai's tallest structure, at 85 metres (279 feet), until an earthquake knocked it down to 60 metres (197 feet). Commissioned by King Saen Muang Ma to hold his father's ashes, it took a century to build, and once housed the Emerald Buddha – the country's most revered icon.

At the edge of the Old Town, Somphet Market sizzles up local snacks. Beyond is a plethora of cafes, art galleries and modern restaurants, representing the simultaneous embrace of tradition and modernity that has transformed Chiang Mai into a tantalising foodie and coffee-lovers' destination. Centred around Nimmanhaemin Road is the city's capital of 'cool', awash with antiques, handcrafts, boutiques and Instagrammable cafes – such as Gongdee, which fuses furniture, art and design with a strong brew.

Just outside the city, the Baan Kang Wat artists' village unites traditional and modern architecture, enveloped in greenery. Its eccentric vendors sell local, organic and sustainable goods, alongside hair salons, a library cafe and yoga studios – many of which offer workshops for those eager to learn pottery and other crafts.

Chiang Mai has become a haven for the hungry-minded, providing a gorgeous natural backdrop for an endless array of courses, workshops and retreats. May Kaidee's Cooking School, which started in Bangkok in 1988, teaches visitors about Thai cuisine, and how to make various traditional dishes, using only vegetarian or vegan ingredients. Meanwhile, Sammy's Organic Thai Cooking School lets aspiring chefs choose which dishes they want to learn, on a farm outside the city. Others like to delve deeper into some of the other Thai arts, such as Muay Thai. Drawing upon traditional Thai Medicine, the Old Medicine Hospital teaches visitors how to deliver a back-walking Thai massage – without sending anyone to hospital.

Chiang Mai is also a beacon for thirsty spiritual wanderers, with a wide variety of yoga, wellness and energy-healing schools, courses and

©Getty/jat306



## "ASIDE FROM NATURAL BEAUTY, CHIANG MAI IS SURROUNDED BY HILL TRIBE VILLAGES"

teachers. With the city surrounded by beautiful temples, it is a natural lighthouse for the soul. From shamanistic healing to yoga, there are myriad outlets spread across the region. An hour outside the city, The Pavana Resort hosts a whole range of retreats, orientated around detoxification, healthy eating, exercise, breathing and clearing the mind.

Elsewhere, Origin Thailand features a reconstructed traditional village, where guests can delve deeper into Thai etiquette, music, dance, flower arrangement and textiles. Back in the city, contemporary jewellery shop Nova also offers classes in Chiang Mai's art of silversmithing. On Saturday nights, Wualai Road, once known for its silver and lacquer workshops, turns into a bright, colourful market – a favourite walking trail among city-break pilgrims. A larger, one-kilometre (0.6-mile) market, complete with bars and food vendors, runs on Sundays between Tha Phae Gate and Ratchadamnoen Road, but this gets far busier.

Though dizzying, Chiang Mai's oldest bazaar, Talat Warorot, is a treasure trove of surprises – from daily essentials and cooking utensils to delicious treats and trinkets. Set beside the Talat Ton Lam Yai flower market, it rests against the Ping River, which vendors traditionally used to haul in local produce. The river can be navigated by kayak, scorpion-tailed boat or even a full-on dinner cruise, with a quick expedition of a local riverside farmhouse, growing fruits, herbs and flowers.

Adrenaline-addicted adventurers need not feel left out, with white-water rafting trips down the Pai River complemented with a zipline session through the rainforest. Those who prefer the



The women of Padaung, a subgroup of the Karen hill tribe, are famous for their incredibly long necks, stretched slowly using brass rings

© FABRIZIO ROBBA / Alamy

company of birds and waterfalls will enjoy hikes through Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, Doi Chiang Dao and Doi Inthanon National Park – home to Thailand's tallest mountain, with a modern temple sat atop.

Aside from natural beauty, Chiang Mai is surrounded by hill tribe villages, migrated from various parts of China and South East Asia. The largest group, the Karen, are refugees from Myanmar. Women from the Karen subgroup, the Padaung, are instantly recognisable by their incredibly long necks, stretched slowly with a series of heavy brass rings, and colourful clothes. Many even have blackened or rotten teeth, from chewing betel.

For those really looking to go off the grid and immerse themselves in a forgotten culture, homestays are available. The Chai Lai Sisters Karen Homestay remains a comfortable compromise, with limited electricity courtesy of

The homestay makes it easy for guests to enjoy a concise, holistic experience of Chiang Mai's main attractions



©Getty/SeanPavonePhoto

### JOY'S HOUSE

For travellers hoping to enjoy the full breadth of Chiang Mai's many faces, Joy's House makes a brilliant base. The family hosts guests in a beautiful home with a swimming pool, from where a variety of tours tackle Chiang Mai's greatest hits. From one-day cooking experiences to week-long expeditions, Joy's House offers a more personal touch than your average tour guide – whether visiting hill tribes, exploring caves, going bamboo rafting or navigating the Mekong River.

Joy's House also runs a spa, which not only offers Thai massages and aromatherapy treatments, but extensive courses. Guests can earn a diploma in Thai massage, or enjoy a week-long yoga retreat with a qualified teacher. Those hoping to explore the region alone can simply pick their preferred classes and pair them with external offerings. The owners also run the Children's Shelter Foundation, which houses and educates hill tribe children from northern Thailand and Myanmar – with guests welcome to help out.

solar panels, and profits going towards a charity for at-risk ethnic minority and refugee women. After an extensive exploration of the city, it could be argued, there's no better way to immerse in the region's natural wonders, culture and hospitality than a night under the stars in the middle of the rainforest.



The city's Saturday Night Market makes for an exciting, yet manageable, walking experience, among a symphony of colours, sights and smells

The 14th-century Wat Phra Singh, home to hundreds of monks and trainees, is an elegant symbol of Lanna prestige



©Getty/FilippoBacci





## SHANGHAI

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## Essential information

If using the excellent metro system, be sure to invest in a metro card.

## Best time to visit

*March to November (to avoid the chilly winter)*

## Time zone

UTC+8

## Useful sites

[SHANGHAICHINA.CA](http://SHANGHAICHINA.CA)

[CHINAHIGHLIGHTS.COM/SHANGHAI](http://CHINAHIGHLIGHTS.COM/SHANGHAI)

[TRAVELCHINAGUIDE.COM/CITYGUIDES/SHANGHAI](http://TRAVELCHINAGUIDE.COM/CITYGUIDES/SHANGHAI)



Shanghai is home to some of the world's tallest buildings, including the 632m (2,073 ft) Shanghai Tower (right)



©Getty/ zhaojankang

# SHANGHAI

## TECHNOLOGY MEETS TRADITION IN CHINA'S EXHILARATING CITY OF CONTRASTS

Be prepared for a sore neck. Shanghai is in the middle of a skyscraper building boom, with thousands of high-rise buildings completed since the turn of the millennium. It means that visitors to this sleek city can gaze out over the Bund waterfront from the world's highest observation deck, zip to the top of the world's second-tallest building at 20.5 metres (67 feet) per second and visit the third-tallest hotel in the world.

That said, Shanghai isn't all cutting-edge engineering and technology – it's also a city of elegance and tradition. The Pudong district on the eastern bank of the Huangpu River may be dominated by the dynamic 21st century, but Puxi in the west is where traces of the old city can be found. Nowhere can this be seen better than the Bund, a riverside boulevard sporting colonial-era buildings on one side and a sleek and crisp modern skyline on the other. Return at night to best appreciate Shanghai's bright and colourful cityscape, with the Oriental Pearl Tower's sphere glittering like a disco ball.

Shanghai's golden age came during the Roaring Twenties, when the city became the financial capital of the eastern hemisphere, a

history that left its mark in the fashionable French Concession. Seek out the labyrinth of alleyways in Tianzifang, packed with cafes, restaurants, galleries and shops. Further back in time, the Old City, inside the 1,000-year-old town walls, is one of the most picturesque districts, with many traditional Chinese buildings. The City God Temple is one of the most famous; it's also worth walking the paths in Yu Garden to explore the exquisite pavilions and carp-filled ponds.

It can be hard to get a grip on the city of contrasts, but one place that helps is the Shanghai Urban Planning Exhibition Hall. It's not at all as dry as the name suggests and the star exhibit is a supremely detailed 600-square-metre (6,500-square-foot) model of Shanghai. The scale of modern development it illustrates is staggering, but as you walk out of the exhibition hall, you'll find yourself back in tranquil People's Square. Here, Shanghai residents can be found going about their surprisingly relaxed, everyday lives: practising tai chi, flying kites, gossiping over a tea, even taking part in ballroom dancing lessons. Yet the subway station a few metres underground is the busiest in China, handling 700,000 passengers every day.



Visit the Yu Garden to see some traditional architecture

©Getty/ chuyu



There is still tranquility to be found within the city walls

©Getty/ trionimages



# KATHMANDU

## BECOME ABSORBED BY ASIAN CULTURE WITH A TRIP TO NEPAL'S EXCITING CAPITAL

Kathmandu is awash with smells, sights and sounds that keep excitement levels at a maximum. Narrow, intertwining streets make way for streams of loud, pushy traffic. Dusty dirt tracks, pot-holed pavements and smells of fragrant spices hit you as you ride down the busy corridors of Nepal's fervent capital.

Anyone who has experienced Kathmandu first hand will happily regale you with stories of how welcoming and friendly Nepalese people are, and how special this capital city is.

From the main airport, jump into a taxi and head straight for the bustling district of Thamel; the commercial heart of the city. This vibrant, noisy district is filled with motorcyclists and cars striving to get ahead of each other, and they are not shy to use their horns. Getting around Kathmandu is best done by foot. You can browse as you pass by numerous shops selling trekking gear, warm clothing and camping goods. For a more laid-back journey, however, you could step aboard a rickshaw peddled by a local

tradesman who'll wind you through the streets towards your next destination.

If all this gets too much, take a stroll into the neo-classical historical Garden of Dreams, situated on the outskirts of Thamel. This is where you can escape from the noise and commotion of the centre in a relaxing outdoor setting.

When you're not planning for the next big adventure into the mountains, explore the plethora of stupas, monasteries and religious temples adorning Kathmandu's streets. Gain a stronger insight into how numerous religions (predominantly Buddhism and Hinduism) live in harmony and run deep through the veins of the people and their city. Head out on a tour around the ancient royal complex of Durbar Square to witness grand palaces and their courtyards; or walk the many steps to Swayambhunath temple, also known as the 'monkey temple', for spectacular views over the city's rooftops. Take a trip up to the impressive World Heritage Site of Boudhanath stupa and spin prayer wheels as

you pass on by. Enjoy hole-in-the-wall restaurants serving up local dishes such as dal bhat, a lentil-based rice meal, as well as spectacularly spiced curries cooked in plain sight in open ovens.

For those looking to explore further afield, Kathmandu makes for a great starting base. Treat your city break as a stepping stone into the Himalayan mountain range. You could end up exploring routes up to Everest Base Camp, or deeper into the Annapurna mountain range for a longer excursion into the snowy wilderness. Tours take off from Tribhuvan International Airport, flying via Lukla to Base Camp, and can last up to two weeks. Planning well ahead of time is essential so as not to lose your spot. Coaches operate from Kathmandu to Pokhara for excursions into the Annapurna Circuit. Alternatively, book a tour down to Chitwan National Park to enjoy a range of activities such as canoeing, rhino and tiger spotting, as well as elephant riding before heading back to the busy streets of Kathmandu.

©Getty/Matteo Colombo



### KATHMANDU

#### Essential information

Be sure to drink only bottled water to avoid an upset stomach.

#### Best time to visit

*October to April (to avoid monsoon season)*

#### Time zone

UTC+5:45

#### Useful sites

[WWW.TOURISMTHAILAND.ORG](http://WWW.TOURISMTHAILAND.ORG)

[WWW.TRAVELHUBCHIANGMAI.COM](http://WWW.TRAVELHUBCHIANGMAI.COM)

[WWW.GUESTHOUSE-CHIANGMAI.COM](http://WWW.GUESTHOUSE-CHIANGMAI.COM)



Colourful prayer flags with printed mantras blow in the wind, and are said to spread positive energy and goodwill



# HO CHI MINH CITY

A RESILIENT CITY, WITH ITS HEART ON ITS SLEEVE, AND AN IMMUTABLE PASSION FOR LIFE

The vibrant city comes alive when the Sun goes down

## ★ HO CHI MINH CITY

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### Essential information

When travelling by taxi, make sure the meter works before setting off.

### Best time to visit

*October to March (to avoid monsoon season) or August (to experience important festivals)*

### Time zone

UTC+7



### Useful sites

[WWW.SAIGONSTREETEATS.COM](http://WWW.SAIGONSTREETEATS.COM)

[WWW.VIETNAM.TRAVEL](http://WWW.VIETNAM.TRAVEL)

[WWW.PRIVATEVIETNAMTOURGUIDE.COM](http://WWW.PRIVATEVIETNAMTOURGUIDE.COM)

©Getty/fototrav

Bursting from the jungle of southeastern Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City is a sensorial explosion, with sights, sounds and smells overflowing in every direction. A foodie mecca, with an immense heritage, it has broken the chains of colonialism, emerging very much its own city.

Though the city still bears the marks of its former oppressors, its 19th-century, neo-Romanesque Notre Dame Cathedral remains not a scar, but an heirloom of its imperialist past. A testament to the city's delicate diversity, its bricks and stained windows overlook the 19th-century, French-designed Saigon Central Post Office – filled with historic maps, clocks and phone booths.

Just a stone's throw away is Reunification Palace, where in April 1975, a tank famously smashed through the walls, marking the end of the Vietnam War. Formerly the home and office of the South Vietnamese president, it now serves as a museum, with a preserved war room, meeting rooms and even a disco.

Elsewhere, what was once known as the Exhibition House for US and Puppet Crimes has since been tactfully renamed the War Remnants Museum. It comprises a comprehensive collection of exhibits, highlighting the human cost of the various wars of imperialism waged against Vietnam. The harrowing experience serves as a powerful backdrop for Cu Chi Tunnels, a vast network of claustrophobic passageways

## "THE CITY HAS SHAKEN OFF ITS PAST WITH A HEARTY EMBRACE OF THE FINER THINGS"

the Viet Cong used to hide soldiers, as well as communications and supply lines.

Back above ground, the city has shaken off its painful past, with a hearty embrace of the finer things in life. Framed by looming colonial buildings, the Saigon River and the People's Committee Building, Nguyen Hue Street offers an endless array of stylish coffee houses. Perhaps the most remarkable cluster is at Number 42, an aging utilitarian block, neatly divided into several shops and cafes – such as Boo, which serves coffee in skull-shaped glasses.

Meanwhile, Thien Hau Pagoda, devoted to the Chinese sea goddess, offers a glimpse into traditional worship, in all its smoky, colourful splendour. Set in the Chinese Quarter, it's well paired with the gold, red and lacquer Quan Am Pagoda, named after the Goddess of Mercy.

Between the city's bustling markets of Ben Thanh and Binh Tay, hawking crafts and produce galore, are its famous food stalls. From delicious crab banh canh – soupy noodles – to Vietnamese pizza, there's no shortage of delicious discoveries to explore. Between mouthfuls, a trip to the Golden Dragon Water Puppet Theater invites guests to indulge in Vietnamese heritage, in a wonderfully whimsical manner. There really is something for everyone.



The beating heart of Ho Chi Minh City's coffee scene is the eclectic Number 42, Nguyen Hue Street

©Elena Ermakova / Alamy



# SIEM REAP

**EVEN BY MODERN STANDARDS, THE ANCIENT TEMPLE COMPLEX OF ANGKOR IS STAGGERING IN SCALE AND COMPLEXITY**

The epicentre of the Cambodian backpacking pilgrimage trail, Siem Reap lives in the shadow of its glorious past. The city is surrounded on all sides by the magnificent 400-square kilometre (155-square-mile) Angkor temple complex, immortalising the pinnacle of the Khmer Empire.

Its origins can be traced back to the 12th-century king, Suryavarman, who established the site in the name of the Hindu deity, Vishnu. Even as the country transitioned into Buddhism, the complex ballooned into one of the world's largest archaeological sites – continuing to play an active role in worship to this day.

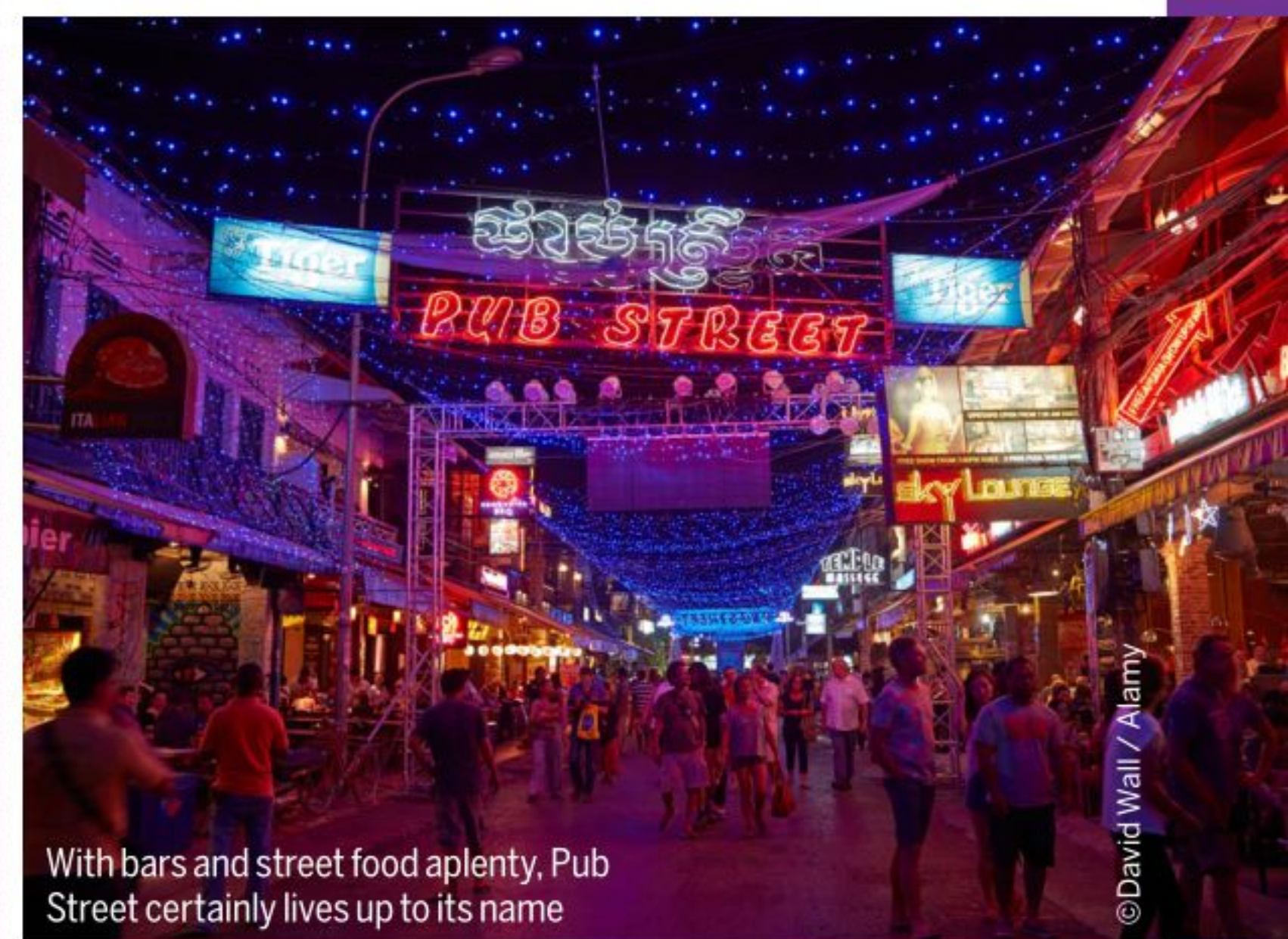
The complex cuts a remarkable landscape, its distinctive 'temple mountains' and 'pillared galleries' rising from the jungle in remarkable fashion, laterite stone slowly crumbling back into the earth. All the while, the details remain preserved, most famously at Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument, which took hundreds of thousands of masons, sculptors, workers and servants three decades to build – even with the help of 6,000 elephants.

While monkeys playfully watch the Sun rise, primping one another's coats, orange-clad

monks and white-robed nuns rustle through the stone corridors, past epic murals and masterful architecture. Stone galleries, quarried from 32 kilometres (20 miles) away, depict Hindu stories, such as the 49-metre-long (160 feet) 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk', reflecting the eternal struggle of good versus evil.

Angkor Wat is a metaphorical reflection of the five peaks of Mount Meru – believed to be the centre of the universe – its tallest tower looming 213 metres (700 feet) high. It's symbolically linked to the surrounding temples through a series of solar alignments. Among the most recognisable is Ta Prohm, colloquially known as 'Tomb Raider Temple' – a manmade wonder reconnecting with the source, captivatingly consumed by enormous fig, banyan and kapok trees. Built as a monastery and university by the conqueror king, Jayavarman VII, its Buddhist iconography has been altered to reflect Hinduism.

Jayavarman also built Angkor Thom, the 'Great City' and final capital of the Khmer Empire, once home to countless priests, officials and dancers. At its centre was Bayon, a magnificent temple adorned with 2,000 faces representing the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and the Mahayana



With bars and street food aplenty, Pub Street certainly lives up to its name

Buddhist royal himself. Standing beside one of these faces provides a great photo opportunity.

After an evening watching the sunset from the stepped pyramid temple, Phnom Bakheng, the city gets ready for the night. From fried tarantulas and snake to pints-a-plenty, Pub Street is the heart of nocturnal action. Conversely, retreats such as the Wayist Spiritual Energy Wellness Center, offer a unique opportunity to truly connect with the spirit of Angkor.

## SIEM REAP

### Essential information

Flip the typical itinerary around, to avoid the worst crowds.

#### Best time to visit

*November and March, for pleasant weather and thinner crowds*

#### Time zone

UTC+7

#### Useful sites

[WWW.SIEMREAP.NET](http://WWW.SIEMREAP.NET)

[WWW.HAPPYANGKORTOUR.COM](http://WWW.HAPPYANGKORTOUR.COM)

[WWW.TOURISMCAMBODIA.COM](http://WWW.TOURISMCAMBODIA.COM)



The Angkor temple complex continues to play a role in the lives of Cambodian spirituality







# The Americas

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# NEW YORK CITY

THERE'S NOWHERE QUITE LIKE NEW YORK, AMERICA'S CENTRE OF CULTURE AND COMMERCE

Welcome to the city that never sleeps. New York is a vast metropolis where anything can happen – one minute you're taking in the neon-lit commercial mecca of Times Square, the next you'll be sipping drinks in a trendy Brooklyn dive bar or strolling through acres of urban greenery in the iconic surrounds of Central Park.

However you choose to begin your New York City adventure, arriving into town via Grand Central Terminal will ensure a suitably splendid entrance. The aptly named station (it's both grand and central) houses elaborate architecture and artwork, providing its 700,000 daily commuters with an inspiring start and end to their journeys.

Manhattan is New York City how you imagine it. Most of the Big Apple's recognisable sites can be found here, including the Empire State Building. This towering landmark and its dazzling coloured lights can be enjoyed from the ground for free, but seeing the city from its 102nd floor observatory is an essential NYC experience.

From up here you can map out the city as the birds do, planning your route through its varied neighbourhoods while basking in the glow of a Manhattan sunset (it's the best time to visit, as you'll see the city transitioning from day to night). For the best view of the tower itself, try Top of the Rock at the Rockefeller Center, which is located directly opposite the Empire State Building and provides similarly spellbinding vistas of the city.

Continue to find your bearings with a walk along the High Line. What used to be an unsightly

freight line through the Meatpacking District has become one of New York's most appealing urban spaces – a 2.4-kilometre (1.5-mile) stretch of green where you can take your time ambling across the city and admiring its sights from nine metres (30 feet) above the ground. Art installations, food vendors and some inspired landscaping make it easy to while away an afternoon enjoying views of the Hudson River.

When you're done with the razzle-dazzle of Manhattan, New York has four other boroughs to explore. Brooklyn is big enough to be its own city – accessible by foot via the stately Brooklyn Bridge – and it's where you'll find independent shops and bars in the hip neighbourhood of Williamsburg, kitsch coastal amusements in Coney Island, and verdant foliage in Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Sports fans will want to spend some time in Queens and the Bronx, home to two of America's most legendary baseball teams. The Mets play at Citi Field in Queens, while the Yankees hit their home runs from Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. If you'd prefer to catch some fast-paced basketball, head to Madison Square Garden, where the Knicks shoot hoops.

Taking the free ferry to Staten Island means you'll catch sight of New York's most recognisable landmark. The Statue of Liberty holds her torch aloft from her pedestal on Liberty Island, which is visible from the boat. For a closer look, take a trip to the island and enjoy a self-guided audio tour to learn about the history of this remarkable monument. Book tickets in

advance if you want to step inside the statue and see New York from Lady Liberty's crown.

Museums in New York provide a cultural antidote to the touristy hubbub of its most



The High Line injects nature and colour into the urban heart of New York City



Central Park's abundant trees come to life with red, orange and yellow in autumn

## CENTRAL PARK

Providing an escape from the bright lights and blaring horns of the big city, Central Park is a 341-hectare (843-acre) oasis that anyone can enjoy. There's no shortage of things to see and do here – whether you're checking out points of interest like Strawberry Fields and Belvedere Castle or kicking back in the expansive communal plains of Sheep Meadow, the park has served as a leisure space for New Yorkers ever since its creation in the 1850s.

Some of the best activities in Central Park include taking in the scenery during a horse-and-carriage ride, and visiting the 130+ species that reside in Central Park Zoo. Depending on when you visit, you might also be able to check out some of the seasonal events that take place in the park each year, such as music concerts in summer and ice skating in winter.



New York's iconic yellow 'medallion' taxicabs charge by a meter based on the duration and distance of your journey



Manhattan's famous skyscrapers include the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building and One World Trade Center

## The Americas

famous sights. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these is the Metropolitan Museum of Art (known as the Met for short). Countless significant artworks fill the walls and halls of this vast museum, with highlights including a reconstruction of an Ancient Egyptian temple and priceless paintings from around the world. Its roof garden and bar provide the perfect place to relax between exhibitions, and contain sculptures by contemporary artists.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) houses one of the world's best collections of work by artists including Vincent van Gogh, Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock. If you're still craving creative prowess after exploring its four levels, there's the Guggenheim; the building is a masterpiece in itself, an inverted-ziggurat structure designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

When you've filled your boots with art, the American Museum of Natural History showcases wonders of an entirely different kind. Kids and adults alike marvel at the feats of evolution inside this temple to Mother Nature, such as a 28.7-metre (94-foot) long blue whale suspended from the ceiling and more dinosaur skeletons than you can shake a prehistoric stick at.

A more sobering experience (but no less vital) is to visit the National September 11 Memorial

& Museum. Here, a pair of square reflective pools surrounded by America's largest man-made waterfalls mark the precise location where the Twin Towers once stood. Around each pool's edge, the names of the 2,983 victims are inscribed into bronze parapets as a tribute to those who lost their lives.

You'll need to keep energy levels up with plenty of food while exploring New York's sprawling neighbourhoods. As luck would have it, this city is one of the best places in the world for eating. Whether you choose to dine in style at one of NYC's many Michelin-starred restaurants or keep it real with meals from street vendors, foodies will be in awe of the culinary variety that can be found here.

Pizza is something of a speciality in New York, and there's no shortage of quality outlets to grab a slice from. Some of the best include Grimaldi's in Brooklyn and Lombardi's in Little Italy. You'll also want to grab a bagel while you're in town; for this, try the smoked salmon and cream cheese number at Russ & Daughters. And what would breakfast in New York be without coffee? The city is awash with independent cafes – you'll barely walk two blocks without discovering one.

But you shouldn't confine yourself to purely local flavours during your stay in New York.

There's a whole world of cuisine here to explore, with more than 200 different nationalities calling the city home. Make the most of this global microcosm by sampling as many delicacies as possible, from steaming noodle bowls in Chinatown to mouthwatering pierogies in Little Poland.



©Getty/rabbit75\_ist

©Getty/Ultima\_Gaina

### NEW YORK CITY

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#### Essential information

Plan on taking the New York City Subway? Save money on multiple journeys with a reloadable MetroCard.

#### Best time to visit

*April to June*

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[WWW.NYCGO.COM](http://WWW.NYCGO.COM)

[WWW.ILOVENY.COM](http://WWW.ILOVENY.COM)

[WWW.LOVING-NEWYORK.COM](http://WWW.LOVING-NEWYORK.COM)



You can walk or cycle from Manhattan to Brooklyn via the Brooklyn Bridge





It's worth taking the trip up onto Cartagena's highest hill for stunning views like this



## CARTAGENA

### Essential information

While Cartagena is located on the coast, expect to travel an hour out of the city to find a nice beach.

#### Best time to visit

*December to April*

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[MURCIATURISTICA.ES/EN/CARTAGENA/](http://MURCIATURISTICA.ES/EN/CARTAGENA/)

[HTTP://MUHCA.GOV.CO/MUHCA](http://MUHCA.GOV.CO/MUHCA)

[HTTP://SANPEDROCLAYER.CO/HOME/](http://SANPEDROCLAYER.CO/HOME/)



# CARTAGENA

## CHARM, VIBRANCY AND HISTORY EXUDE OUTWARDS FROM A STUNNING WALLED OLD TOWN

Nestled on the Caribbean coast in the north of Colombia, this jewel of a city boasts a UNESCO World Heritage old town where centuries-old walls line cobbled alleys, and stunning historic architecture surrounds you on every side, embodying a fascinating past waiting to tell its story.

Give yourself plenty of time to meander within the walled old town in the districts of El Centro and San Diego. Here you'll discover superbly preserved examples of colonial architecture in a maze of cobbled streets, spotting beautiful balconies draped in ornamental vines and bushes above you, wandering into shady plazas, snacking on superb local food, and coming across impressive churches and stunning mansions as you go. It's also worth returning at night to see the area in a completely different, but no less seductive, light.

While you are in the old town, it's worth stopping off at the Palacio de la Inquisición. Your attention may first be drawn to its impressive baroque stone gateway and beautiful balconies and, indeed, there are plenty of aesthetic pleasures to enjoy here, with the building hosting artefacts telling the story of the city from pre-Colombian times onward. However,

this building has a dark history, hosting as it did the infamously brutal Inquisition, who cracked down on 'crimes' of witchcraft, magic and blasphemy, executing hundreds of people between the building's completion around 1770 and independence in 1821. The museum here will tell you that history, displaying some of the Inquisition's terrible tools of torture.

Also check out Iglesia de San Pedro Claver, a church and museum that features a beautiful courtyard in the centre of its towering walls, which shows off pre-Colombian pottery, as well as contemporary art.

Once you've explored the heart of the city, consider making a pilgrimage to Convento de la Popa (preferably by taxi as you'll pass through some unsafe neighbourhoods if you walk), a convent founded in 1607 at the highest point in Cartagena. Here you'll discover a wonderful chapel adorned with an image of the patroness of the city, La Virgen de la Candelaria, and you'll be treated to a fantastic view of the city below you.

The Castillo de San Felipe de Barajas is another destination worth making time for. Built by the Spaniards in the 17th century, this impregnable fortress still dominates a large section of the city. Tours are available to guide you through the

fortresses' tunnels, built to enhance noise so that defenders could communicate easily or hear the enemy coming.



**ABOVE:** This is the kind of wonderful architecture you will discover in the city's old town



# VANCOUVER

**'WEST COAST, BEST COAST' IS A PHRASE OFTEN HEARD IN VANCOUVER, AND IT'S EASY TO SEE WHY WHEN YOU EXPLORE THIS CANADIAN CITY YOURSELF**

While some write Vancouver off as pricey, you'll find many of its attractions are either free or on a par with other cities. Stanley Park is one such attraction. Easily accessible by public transport, car or on foot, Stanley Park is a 400-hectare (988-acre) sanctuary nestled in the middle of the city. For a relaxing, free activity, you can wander through the gardens or stroll along the seawall and marvel at the cityscape. The Vancouver Aquarium is also located in Stanley Park, with general admission for adults at £22.50+VAT (\$29+VAT).

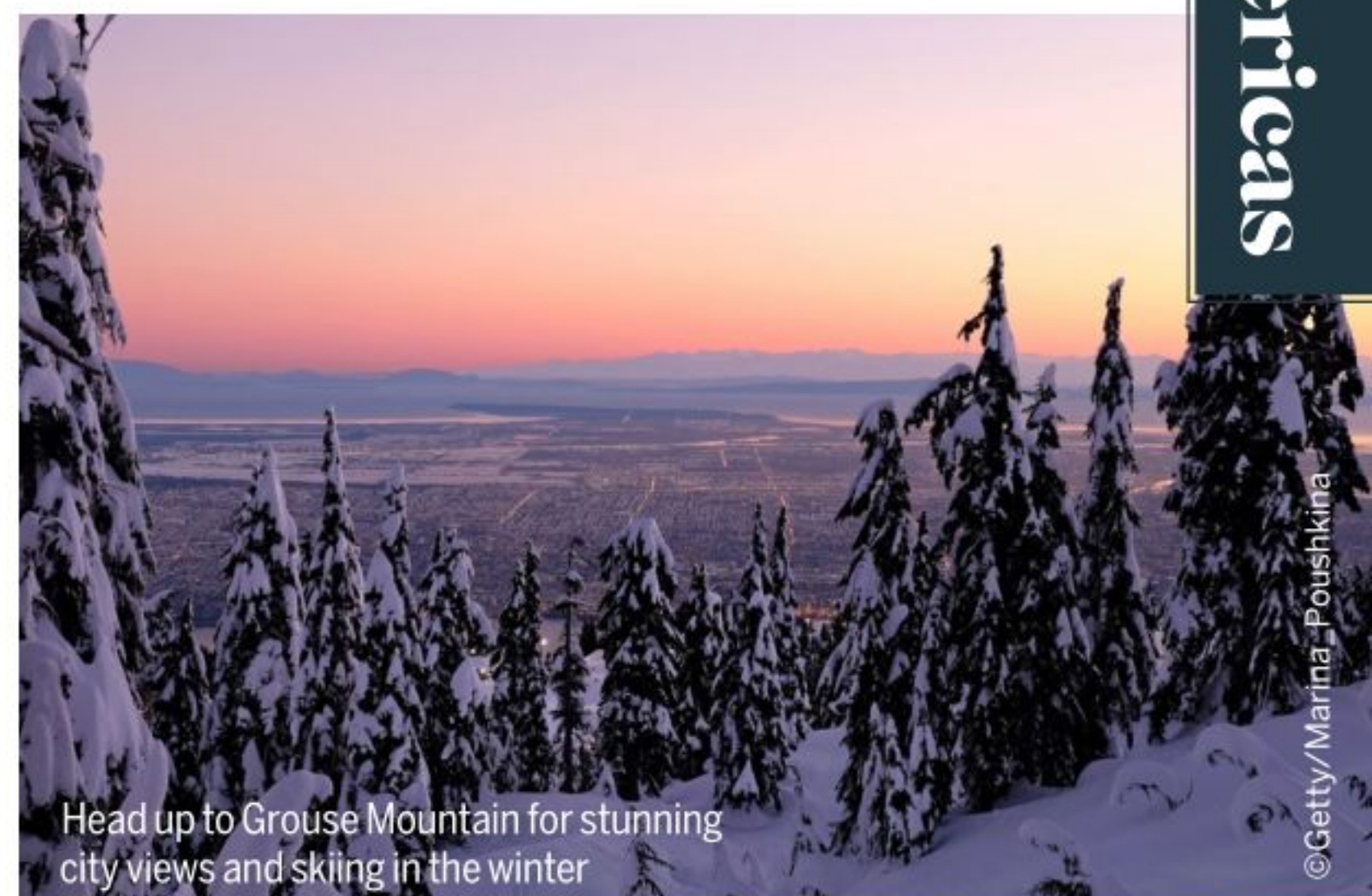
Granville Island is another iconic part of the Vancouver landscape. Here you'll find the Public Market, where more than 300 businesses operate daily and cater to all your shopping needs. You can also visit Granville Island Brewing, Canada's first microbrewery. While exploring Granville Island, keep an ear out for the fantastic buskers. All buskers performing in this area are licensed, so prepare for some great performances.

Vancouver is known for its incredible restaurant scene, so make sure you visit Commercial Drive. 'The Drive' is home to a huge number of restaurants, bars and cafes, as well as Vancouver's Little Italy. Its bohemian nature also makes for a great shopping destination, where

you can find crafts and clothing made by local artists. Other neighbourhoods to visit include laid-back Kitsilano, historic Gastown, and Davie Village, the heart of Vancouver's LGBT+ community.

For those wanting to explore the great outdoors, take the SeaBus over to North Vancouver and visit Capilano Suspension Bridge Park. Entry for adults is £32 (\$40) and allows access to all areas of the park. Cross the suspension bridge, complete the Treetops Adventure, and learn about some of British Columbia's First Nations people at Kia'palano. If you prefer something a little quieter, consider visiting nearby Lynn Canyon Park. The park is free to visit and boasts another stunning suspension bridge and plenty of hiking opportunities. For those truly wanting a challenge, head to Grouse Mountain and attempt the 'Grouse Grind', an aptly named physical challenge that has competitors making their way up Grouse Mountain by completing a 3,000-step vertical hike.

Vancouver is a city of contradictions: modern yet historical, surrounded by nature and skyscrapers, and with more different cultural influences than seem possible. Take a look for yourself and before long, you'll also be proclaiming 'west coast, best coast'.



Head up to Grouse Mountain for stunning city views and skiing in the winter

©Getty/Marina Poushkina



The Vancouver skyline, seen from Stanley Park

 **VANCOUVER**

## Essential information

Buy a 'Compass card' – Vancouver has fantastic public transport, and this card can get you on the bus, SkyTrain and SeaBus ferry.

**Best time to visit**  
*May to September*

**Time zone**  
UTC-8

### Useful sites

[WWW.TIMEOUT.COM/VANCOUVER](http://WWW.TIMEOUT.COM/VANCOUVER)  
[WWW.TOURISMVANCOUVER.COM](http://WWW.TOURISMVANCOUVER.COM)  
[VANCOUVERSNORTHSHORE.COM/THINGS-TO-DO](http://VANCOUVERSNORTHSHORE.COM/THINGS-TO-DO)



Granville Island, home to the daily Public Market



©Getty/Hisham Ibrahim



Explore this stunning city by foot to take in all its beautiful architecture

## BUENOS AIRES

### Essential information

Check which vaccinations you need to take before arriving.

#### Best time to visit

*March to May or October to December*

#### Time zone

UTC-3



#### Useful sites

[WWW.TURISMO.BUENOSAIRES.GOB.AR/EN](http://WWW.TURISMO.BUENOSAIRES.GOB.AR/EN)

[WWW.BUENOSAIRESFREEWALKS.COM](http://WWW.BUENOSAIRESFREEWALKS.COM)

[WWW.WANDER-ARGENTINA.COM](http://WWW.WANDER-ARGENTINA.COM)



©Getty/ mihtiander

# BUENOS AIRES

**WITNESS STUNNING ARCHITECTURE AND EVOCATIVE DANCE ROUND EVERY CORNER, ALL THE WHILE ENJOYING SOME OF THE BEST FOOD AND DRINK IN THE WORLD**

The Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires is considered to be the most European of South America's cities, with splendid and eclectic architecture around every corner. It's for this reason that the city is best explored by foot. From the impressive Recoleta Cemetery to the grand and crumbling colonial houses, the city displays a distinct contrast of old and new.

Buenos Aires is where tango was born; an expressive dance that first made its debut on the city's streets nearly 150 years ago. And you're never far away from a live performance, whether sipping red wine in a bar, or dining in a low-key theatre, tango is likely to be on the agenda. Head to Café Tortoni for some exquisite coffee, and then on to Esquina Carlos for some of the finest tango the city has to offer.

Stroll into the neighbourhood of La Boca (literally meaning 'the mouth') and you'll be met with iconic, brightly coloured shacks, reflecting the city's early immigrant days. Walk through the Caminito street museum to see local artists and interesting displays. You might want

to walk through one of the open-air fairs, the city's outdoor markets, which flaunt an array of treasures and keepsakes – the perfect way to spend a Sunday morning. The Plaza de Mayo is where you'll come across the city's main cathedral, the Catedral Metropolitana; the former seat of the colonial government, the Cabildo; and the government house, the Casa Rosada. The Plaza de Mayo is also a place of political importance, whereby protests and memorials take place on a regular basis.

A visit to Buenos Aires wouldn't be complete without a taste of locally brewed mate, a refreshing caffeine-rich drink not too dissimilar to tea. Mate is drunk from a small pot through a straw, and it's such a big part of the Argentine culture that whenever visiting someone's home, mate will be the first thing on offer. As well as mate, Buenos Aires is well known for its mouth-watering steak and incredible wines. The city transforms at night, with restaurants taking reservations usually from 9pm, followed by bars that usually get going at midnight, swiftly

followed by clubs. The diverse range of live-music venues, tango halls and bars make this a great location for letting your hair down and dancing away until the early hours.

Caminito is located in La Boca, an area known for its brightly coloured homes and museums



©Getty/ Nikada



# QUITO

## STUNNING HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE ON THE INSIDE, A DRAMATIC MOUNTAIN RANGE ON THE OUTSIDE

**D**ramatically set high in the Andes, with the volcano of Pichincha providing a jaw-dropping backdrop to the city, Ecuador's capital, Quito, is a city that will delight you with a variety of stunning sights.

To get yourself a great view of the city, you've got a couple of options. One is to visit an important symbol of Quito, the winged Virgin Mary, located at the top of El Panecillo. Alternatively, jump on to the TelefériQo cable car for a ten-minute ride to the top of Cruz Loma. From that 4,100-metre (13,000-foot) vantage point, you can stare in awe at the surrounding mountains and the city nestled far below.

Get stuck into the city itself by exploring Quito's historic district, one of the oldest and best preserved old towns in the world. Consider starting off in the Plaza Grande, where you'll find

the Presidential Palace. From here, you can roam off into cobbled streets to enjoy the Old Town's incredible colonial architecture. Make sure you stop off at Calle de la Ronda, a street packed with cafes, art galleries and shops.

There is a bounty of beautiful churches vying for your attention in Quito – make sure you visit at least some of them. From the aforementioned Plaza Grande, you're a short hop from the 17th-century Compañía de Jesus. The Spanish Baroque style of the exterior is already something to behold, but just wait until you get inside. The church's interior is lavishly decorated, with gold covering almost every centimetre of the place.

The Basílica del Voto Nacional is also not far from the historic Old Town, showcasing a Gothic style where gargoyles have been substituted for Ecuadorian wildlife. Here, you can enjoy the



©Getty/Cayambe Statue

**ABOVE:** The winged Virgin Mary looks over Quito's historic Old Town

spectacle of its huge stained glass windows, or the view from the top of its tower.

If you're looking for museums, Quito won't disappoint either. Capilla del Hombre is a creation of Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín, dedicated to the people of Latin America and the world and the suffering they have had to endure. The art exhibit features murals and sculptures and is located next to a museum with a larger collection of Guayasamín's work. We'd also recommend the Museo Nacional. It is a huge repository of Ecuadorian art and contains many fascinating pieces going back as far as 12,000 BCE, giving you a fascinating look at Ecuador's culture and history.

Climb to the top of the Basílica del Voto Nacional for spectacular views



### QUITO

#### Essential information

A free walking tour leaves from Community Hostel, Pedro Fermin Cevallos at 10:30am Monday to Saturday.

#### Best time to visit

January - June

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[WHC.UNESCO.ORG/EN/LIST/2](http://WHC.UNESCO.ORG/EN/LIST/2)

[WWW.PPS.ORG/PLACES/CAPILLA-DEL-HOMBRE-CHAPEL-OF-THE-MAN](http://WWW.PPS.ORG/PLACES/CAPILLA-DEL-HOMBRE-CHAPEL-OF-THE-MAN)

[WWW.QUITOTRAVEL.EC/EN](http://WWW.QUITOTRAVEL.EC/EN)



©Getty/Photogilio



# RIO DE JANEIRO

BATHE IN THE BRAZILIAN SUNSHINE IN THE COUNTRY'S SEASIDE CITY

Known to locals as the Cidade Maravilhosa – the marvellous city – it is not hard to believe that Rio de Janeiro is seen as the beating heart of Brazil. The city is formed of endless stretches of golden sand, unmissable fiestas and boundless mountains as its backdrop. The beaches are one of the main attractions that have lured travellers in over the years, with one of the most famous being Copacabana beach. Stretching over four kilometres (2.5 miles) of white sand, the beach is a great place to hang out and watch the world go by with a caipirinha! Other note-worthy beaches include the nearby beach of Ipanema. It is from this local spot that visitors can expect an unforgettable view of the Dois Irmãos (two brothers). These two mountains sit at the western end of the beach and form an unusual backdrop to it.

When swimming in these shores, it's always best to bear in mind that Ipanema

is an indigenous word for 'bad, dangerous waters', which is no surprise given the strong undercurrent and usually choppy surface of the ocean. If there's anything to be learnt from visiting these beaches it's that the locals use them as their back garden. Expect to see countless games of volleyball, surfers playing in the waves, rollerbladers gliding the pavements and power-walkers marching along the promenade. It appears that all of Rio's residents take to the beach to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. With such a laid-back approach on the beaches, it's easy to forget that you're in a city.

If beaches aren't your thing and you prefer sinking your teeth into the culture, then why not embark on a tour to the favelas, or the shanty

towns, which form the backbone to this urban jungle. During the 1970s, favelas started to grow, as many people fled the countryside in search of more opportunities in the city. Today in Rio alone there are more than 800 favelas; 1.5 million people call a favela home. Part of the appeal to visit the favelas is the unusual architecture. Each has a unique and distinct design to its building, which is usually a stack of misshapen buildings piled on top of one another like Lego. Arguably the most famous of Rio's favelas is Santa Marta, located in Botafogo. Its fame is due to a Michael Jackson tribute statue that can be found here. The largest of the favelas of Rio is Rocinha, but it's not advised to visit here unless you are travelling with a tour guide, as it can be unsafe.

**"ON THE BEACHES IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT YOU'RE IN A CITY"**

Don't miss the unbeatable view from the top of Corcovado

 **RIO DE JANEIRO**

## Essential information

At the airport, go to the departure zone to take a taxi. Taxis are less expensive here than at the arrival zone.

### Best time to visit

*February (to ensure you don't miss out on Carnival)*

### Time zone

UTC-3



### Useful sites

[WWW.BRAZIL.ORG.ZA/RIO-DE-JANEIRO-CITY.HTML](http://WWW.BRAZIL.ORG.ZA/RIO-DE-JANEIRO-CITY.HTML)  
[WWW.RIODEJANEIRO.COM/V/CITY-INFO](http://WWW.RIODEJANEIRO.COM/V/CITY-INFO)  
[WWW.GRINGO-RIO.COM/ACCOMMODATION-TRAVEL-IN-RIO/GETTING-AROUND-RIO](http://WWW.GRINGO-RIO.COM/ACCOMMODATION-TRAVEL-IN-RIO/GETTING-AROUND-RIO)





Take the cable car up to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain to see the 360-degree view of the city and its golden beaches



Embrace the colours and sounds of the biggest party on Earth

## The Americas



## CHRIST THE REDEEMER

At the top of Corcovado sits the iconic art-deco statue of Christ the Redeemer standing in all its glory. Located at Parque Nacional de Tijuca, 710 metres (2,329 feet) above sea level, it's impossible to imagine a trip to Rio without marvelling at the grandeur of the granite peak. Reaching the statue can be an achievement in itself. After the 20-minute train ride, there are more than 220 steps that need climbing to lead you to the famous statue's feet. However, it's worth the effort when you reach the top and can see the panoramic views of the city that fall at the feet of Corcovado. Anyone who travels on Corcovado's railway also helps to preserve the forest, as a proportion of the fee goes towards the Brazilian Institute of the Environment (IBAMA), which is in charge of forest conservation.

A trip to Rio would not be complete without taking the cable car up to Sugarloaf mountain, also known as Pão de Açúcar. This is one of the several monolithic granite and quartz mountains that tower over the city. This picture-perfect mountain reaches 396 metres (1,299 feet), and invites visitors to experience a 360-degree view of the city, Guanabara Bay and the endless blue waters of the Atlantic that form below it. In order to reach the summit, you have to ascend in two stages: first to the top of Urca Hill and then from here in a cable car to the top of the mountain. Both journeys last a total of three minutes, and tickets for the experience can be bought at the base of the mountain.

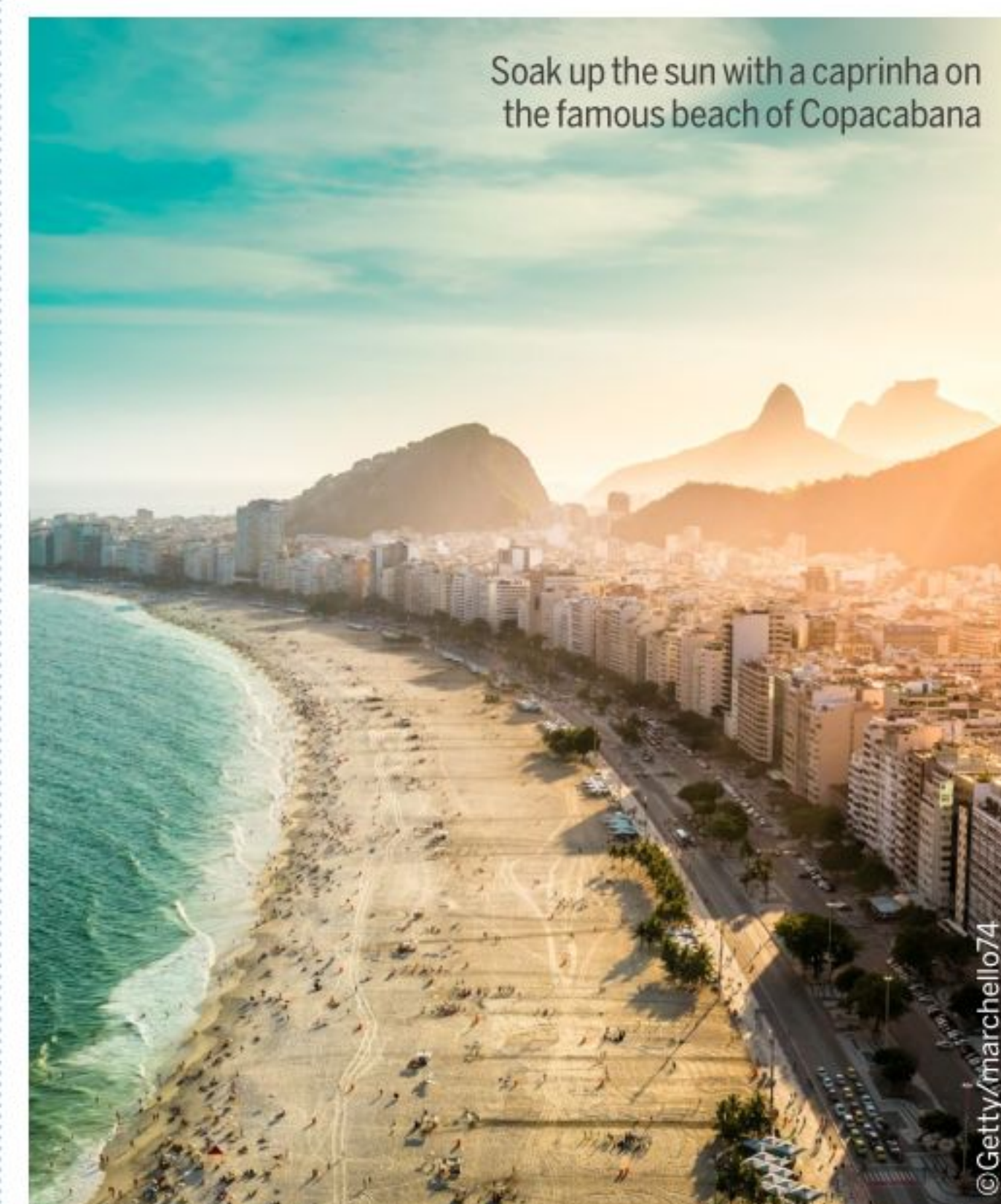
If partying is what you are after, then you've come to the right place! Music, samba and dance flow through this city, and it's not an unusual site to find people dancing in the streets. The biggest party of all falls in February each year, and is commonly known as Rio Carnival. The world's

best-known party calls on more than two million people to flock to the streets and dance the days away to the sounds of the samba. During Carnival season, local samba schools show off their rhythm in the Sambódrom – a purpose-built exhibition space to hold the samba parade. Party-goers can also enjoy the beat by boogying at one of the 500 street parties that continue way into the early hours of the morning. If you plan on visiting Rio during Carnival, it's best to pack your dancing shoes, sequins and endless feathers, as they don't take dressing up lightly! The wackier the costume, the more you're likely to fit in and feel at home – just watch out for the 'Bate Bolas', a group of young men dressed as vibrant jesters with beach-ball whips.

If you have any energy left, hail a taxi to the district of Lapa, as this is another great place to dance and grab a generously sized caprinha. Rio is absolutely overflowing with energy and life – it truly is the city that never sleeps.



Sink your teeth into the culture of Rio and visit a neighbouring favela



Soak up the sun with a caprinha on the famous beach of Copacabana





## Essential information

Tourist destinations are well-served by public transport, but there's no public transport to and from the airport.

## Best time to visit

*June to August (unless you're looking to do some winter sports)*

## Time zone

UTC-3.5



## Useful sites

WWW.THEROOMS.CA  
PC.GC.CA/EN/LHN-NHS/NL/SIGNALHILL  
WWW.GEOCENTRE.CA

# ST JOHN'S

## A COSY SMALL-TOWN FEEL IN A CITY SURROUNDED BY A BEAUTIFUL WILDERNESS

The rugged shoreline of an Atlantic island isn't where you'd expect to find a large city with a bustling street culture, but that's exactly what you'll discover when you visit St John's, situated off the east coast of Canada on the island of Newfoundland.

Given its location, St John's provides a great base from which wilderness lovers can head out for invigorating hikes along rocky cliff tops, or to sea to spot whales before returning to the convenience and comfort of a modern but laid-back urban area and the friendly locals that live there. That's if you want to leave the city at all once you see how much it has to offer.

St John's' most famous sight is Signal Hill. At the top of the hill, you'll find a small castle called Cabot Tower. The visitor centre at the site will walk you through the area's fascinating history, including the last North American battle of the Seven Years' War, which took place there in 1762. Aside from the history, you'll also be treated to an incredible view of the coast and the city, which lie below the castle.

While visiting Signal Hill, you should make time for a detour to Quidi Vidi, a beautiful old village where you can visit the 1750s Mallard Cottage,

now serving authentic Newfoundland food. Or why not enjoy a scenic drink on the village wharf at the 1762 Quidi Vidi Battery?

From the Hill, it's also a short hop to the Johnson Geo Centre, a science museum with exhibits on geology, space exploration, natural resources and more, that caters well for kids.

Once you're back in the city itself, you need to check out the eclectic collection at The Rooms, which is part art gallery, part museum and part cultural space. You'll find historical exhibitions on the Trail of the Caribou, aviation and costumes; natural history exhibits that include fossils and a giant squid; and contemporary art that could include paintings, video and photography, depending on which fascinating exhibits happen to be on when you visit.

You can find yet another quirky sight in the form of the Fluvarium. This is a glass-enclosed section of the river Nagle's Hill Brook, the idea being that you can take a unique look into the life of a living river – spotting fish, eels and other wildlife. For another water-themed attraction, head to the Royal St John's Regatta Museum on the edge of Quidi Vidi Lake to find out about the history of this famed rowing race.



ABOVE: You can expect a splash of colour set against the beautiful wilderness surrounding you in St John's



ABOVE: Lake Quidi Vidi and the city of St John's surrounding it



# SANTIAGO

**DYNAMIC AND DIVERSE, CHILE'S CHARMING CAPITAL DOES JUSTICE TO ITS MAJESTIC BACKDROP**

Sandwiched between the magnificent snow-capped Andes and the never-ending Pacific, Santiago is a city with an unrivalled locale. Merging old-world charm with modern sensibilities, the metropolis is a jigsaw of neighbourhoods, each with a distinct character and flavour.

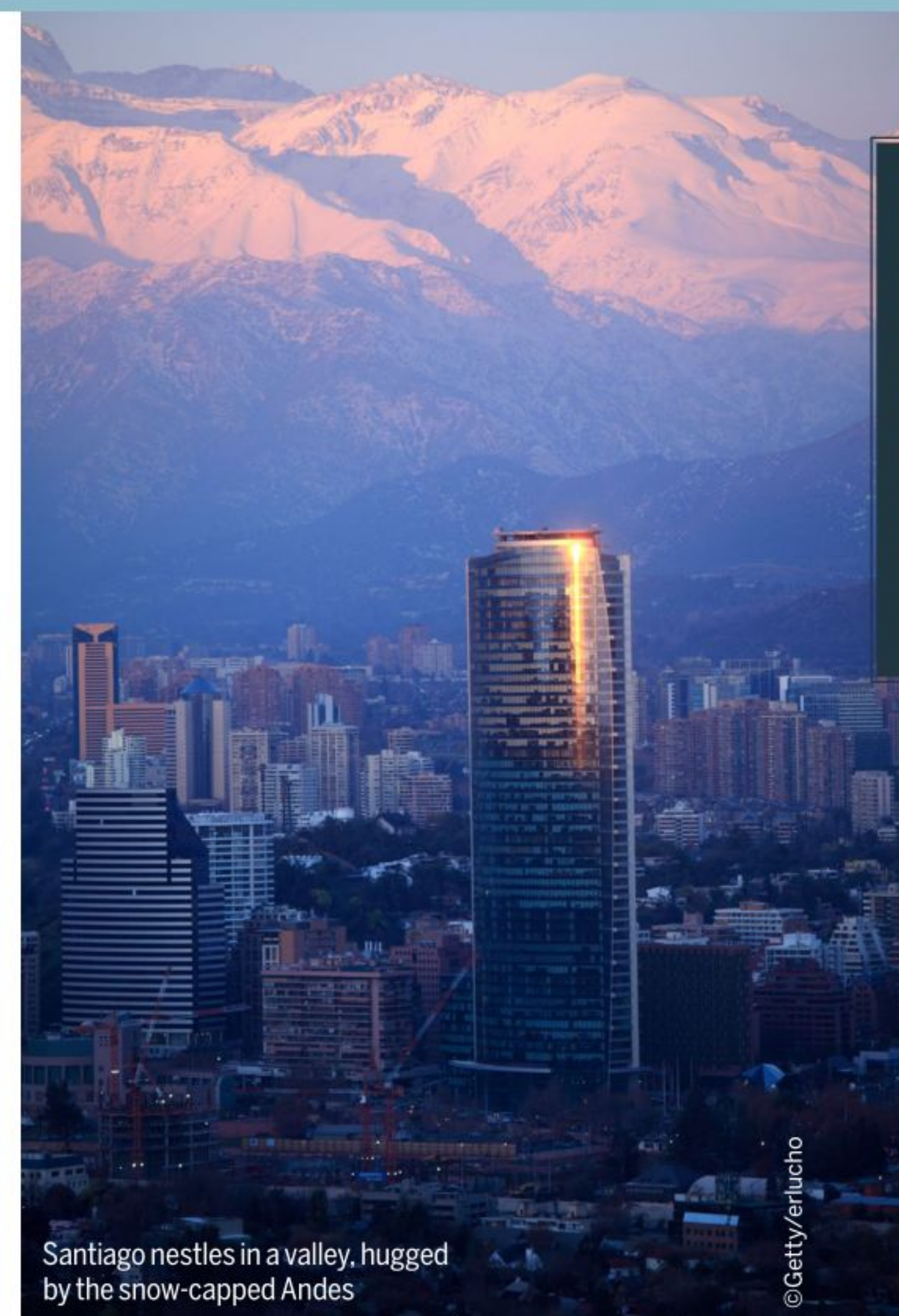
Exploration begins on foot in the hip enclave of Lastarria, home to a slew of museums and galleries, including the Museo de Artes Visuales and Museum of Contemporary Art. Named after the famed Chilean poet, the cultural and performing-arts hub, Centro Gabriela Mistral, hosts concerts and performances inside its colossal oxidised-steel edifice.

With cultural curiosities satiated, there are restaurants and bars aplenty. For steak au poivre or crêpes Suzette, those in the know head to Les Assassins, a family-run, Parisian-inspired spot. Alternatively, Mulato's seasonal menu is replete with freshly caught seafood. A short stroll west lies Cerro Santa Lucía, a lovingly manicured hillside park. Trails snake through the terraces and Japanese gardens, leading travellers skyward to the summit of Torre Mirador and its string of pretty chapels.

The cultural circuit continues through the neighbourhood of Bellavista, at La Chascona – the former hideaway of celebrated poet and Nobel Prize winner, Pablo Neruda. Close by, the charming neighbourhood of Barrio Italia unfolds like an open-air gallery, packed with antique, design and craft stores. When hunger strikes, the family-run Restaurante y Trattoria Da Noi serves up classic Italian staples like truffle risotto and fresh pumpkin tortellini, while Casarez offers an ever-evolving menu of delectably fresh fish.

For a slice of history, travellers make a beeline for the historic centre's grand squares, including Plaza de Armas. Here sits the Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino and its unrivalled collection of pottery. Other must-sees include Mapuche totems and wooden spatulas used by Amazonian shamans to purge their stomachs before taking psychoactive drugs.

Just south of the plaza lies Chile's presidential offices, Palacio de la Moneda. Designed by renowned Italian architect, Joaquín Toesca, the sprawling neoclassical building was built in the late-18th century. Guided tours can be arranged for travellers who apply in advance. A short stroll north is Mercado Central, Santiago's bustling



Santiago nestles in a valley, hugged by the snow-capped Andes

©Getty/erlucho

fish market. While locals come to haggle over the day's catch, travellers can sample the super-fresh ceviche, clams or caldillo de congrio – a fish and tomato stew.

Those in search of handcrafted textiles or ceramics head to Pueblito Los Dominicos, an arts and crafts village in the eastern stretch of the city. Here, over 200 shops brim with traditional leatherwork, woodwork, paintings and jewellery, as well as flowers, plants and herbs.

The main square, Plaza de Armas, is home to the neoclassical Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral

 **SANTIAGO**

## Essential information

If you want to live like a Chilean, don't head out to dinner earlier than 9pm.

### Best time to visit

*December to March for sunshine and fewer crowds*

### Time zone

UTC-3

### Useful sites

[WWW.CHILE.TRAVEL/EN](http://WWW.CHILE.TRAVEL/EN)  
[WWW.SANTIAGOCAPITAL.CL](http://WWW.SANTIAGOCAPITAL.CL)  
[WWW.MAVI.CL](http://WWW.MAVI.CL)



©Sorin Colac / Alamy



# TORONTO

THE BUSTLING CANADIAN CITY BOASTS ENOUGH SIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES TO KEEP YOU BUSY FOR WEEKS

 **TORONTO**

## Essential information

With so much to do, make sure to come up with an itinerary so you don't miss out.

### Best time to visit

*Late May to September to enjoy Toronto's host of summer festivals*

### Time zone

UTC-5

### Useful sites

[WWW.CNTOWER.CA](http://WWW.CNTOWER.CA)  
[LOCALFOODTOURS.COM/TORONTO](http://LOCALFOODTOURS.COM/TORONTO)  
[WWW.TORONTOISLAND.COM](http://WWW.TORONTOISLAND.COM)



Capture your own photo of Toronto's iconic skyline

©Getty/Deeplot

What better place for a fun-filled, action-packed getaway than Toronto, one of the most multicultural and vibrant cities in the world? Whether you plan on spending your time exploring the sprawling city or the stunning nature that surrounds it, there's certainly no shortage of things to do.

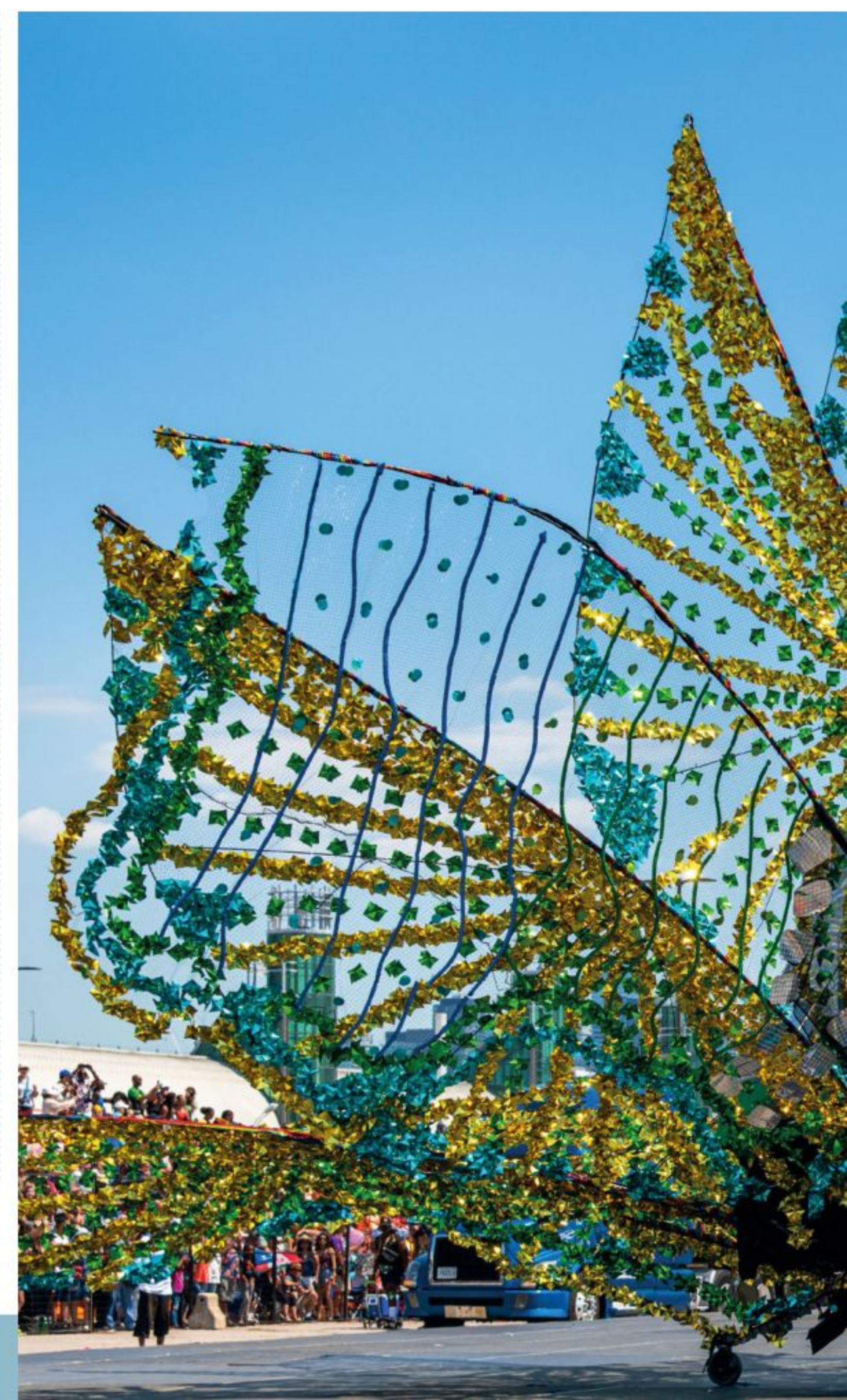
Start, for example, with the iconic CN Tower, an enduring addition to most Toronto recommendation lists, and for good reason. A trip to the busy city just isn't complete without making the mini pilgrimage to the Tower. Make your way up to the LookOut Level, 346 metres (1,136 feet) above ground, and experience breathtaking and unrivalled panoramic views of the bustling city below or dine at the restaurant. For those feeling particularly brave, venture out onto the edge of the Tower where you'll be able to participate in a hands-free walk around the ledge of its main pod.

After the Tower, it's time to wander off the well-trodden path and discover some of the city's more underappreciated gems. Visit a secret and serene bamboo forest in the heart of downtown Toronto at the Donnelly Centre, head on over to Humber Bay Park East where you'll find a secluded open-air butterfly garden (most butterfly activity occurs between April

and mid October), or pass by the Casa Loma, an inexplicably European-style castle in the middle of Toronto that has served as the location for several movies such as *X-Men*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and more.

When it comes to galleries and museums, Toronto boasts an exhaustive selection of both. Consider the Art Gallery of Ontario (home to over 98,000 works from the 1st century CE onwards), the Aga Khan Museum (North America's first museum dedicated to Islamic civilisations), the Museum of Illusions (both Instagram- and child-friendly), or even the oddly charming Bata Shoe Museum. Started by businesswoman Sonja Bata in the 1940s, it is now home to over 13,000 pairs of shoes (making it the world's largest collection) from different time periods all over the world.

For a more up-close-and-personal view of the city, why not spend your time wandering around trying to spot some of Toronto's many peculiarities such as Leslieville's Crazy Doll House (a front garden filled to the brim with stuffed toys, dolls and other childhood delights), Toronto's Little House (the smallest house in Toronto at just 17 centimetres (eight inches) wide and with less than 27 metres squared (300 square feet) of living space), or even the tongue-in-cheek neighbourhood watch signs, which





## "EXPERIENCE BREATHTAKING AND UNRIVALLED PANORAMIC VIEWS OF THE BUSTLING CITY"

see the Incredible Hulk, Yoda and Captain Kirk, among other fictional heroes, vowing to protect the city.

As one of the most diverse cities in the world, there's a seemingly endless range of cuisines at your disposal in Toronto. Make your way to Kensington Market and join an exquisitely crafted food tour of some of the city's most ethnically and culturally diverse neighbourhoods. Tuck into Chinese dumplings and pork buns, cheese from all over the world, Jamaican patties, fish and chips, Portuguese-inspired Chinese egg tarts and much, much more. Don't forget to try some of Canada's homegrown delicacies such as poutine (you'll find some of the best in the city at the aptly named Nom Nom Nom Poutine stall by Alexandra Park). Unlike in other countries, Canadian butchers carry a range of game meat including venison, bison and even boar. Give the leaner meats a try and grab a cut or two from Sanagan's Meat Locker in Kensington Market.

Toronto itself has plenty to offer, but with the stunning landscape that surrounds it, you'd be remiss not to set aside a day dedicated to exploring the scenery. Just a short ferry or water taxi ride away from mainland Toronto, you'll find a chain of 15 small islands known as the Toronto Islands. Get away from the hustle and bustle of the city and relax on one of the many swimming beaches on the islands, partake in some recreational boating or cycling, try a round

Spend a day enjoying the Toronto Islands



©Getty/Gail Spotlander

of flying disc golf, or enjoy the novelty of the 1900s-style Centreville Amusement Park. For those willing to venture slightly further out, an hour's car journey from Toronto will take you to Tew Falls, a dramatic cliff edge with an almost prehistoric feel. Visit at sunset for the most breathtaking views.

Those visiting during the summer months should take advantage of the many festivals and events the city has to offer such as the annual Jazz Festival, AfroFest (a celebration of African music), BrazilFest, and Caribana, a celebration of Caribbean culture that has become one of

Visit during the summer to enjoy Toronto's most famous and most popular festival



©Getty/Roberto Machado Noa



©Getty/Roberto Machado Noa

### CASA LOMA

Built in the early 20th century as a home for financier Sir Henry Pellatt, Casa Loma is now one of Toronto's most distinctive landmarks thanks to its European Gothic-style architecture. Wander through the sprawling gardens, admire its unique architecture, and pay a visit to the two exhibits housed within its walls; the Girl Guide exhibit and the vintage car exhibition, featuring antique cars from the early 1900s. Throughout the year, events are held at Casa Loma, from summer concerts to escape rooms and even a live haunted house throughout October. Casa Loma is a must for history lovers or those who just want to enjoy an opulent afternoon while visiting Toronto.

**ABOVE:** Though at odds against Toronto's skyscrapers, this European castle is a delight to visit

Toronto's biggest events of the year. Likewise, winter in the city also has plenty on offer such as the Toronto Light Festival, where the Historic Distillery District is transformed into an open-air gallery, and Winterfolk, an annual Blues and Roots festival.

Join a food tour at Kensington Market



©Getty/Arpad Benedek





Lined with hotels, restaurants and bars, Waikiki Beach is famous for its surf

# HONOLULU

SYNONYMOUS FOR ITS SURF, BEACHES AND HOTELS, THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THIS ISLAND CITY THAN JUST CLICHÉS

In the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean lie the islands of the state of Hawaii and its capital city, Honolulu. Famed for its palm-tree-lined beaches, high-rise hotels and a big surf scene, planning a visit to Honolulu should entail a blend of relaxation, adventure and culture. Landing on the island of Oahu, you'll initially bear witness to the busy streets, shopping malls and towering hotels, only to quickly reach the beautiful clear waters and golden sandy beaches on the other side of the city.

Treating surfers to clear waters and a perfect swell, the famous Waikiki Beach is where beachgoers should look to start and end their trip. It's in the Waikiki neighbourhood, which is where you'll find most of the hotels and resorts Honolulu has to offer. Walking down Kalakaua

Avenue at night presents a very different side to the city, with restaurants, bars and clubs lighting up the streets and revealing a more affluent edge in comparison to the rest of the island.

Waikiki is also home to the Honolulu Zoo and Aquarium, ideal for all ages and a great way to spend time when not on the beach. Not far from the city's centre is the historic Pearl Harbor National Memorial, serving as a reminder of the events that unfolded during World War II. Capturing the Pacific Islands and the differing cultures, pay a visit to the Bishop Museum just a short drive away. This makes for a worthwhile family experience where you can also enjoy the museum's planetarium.

Overlooking the city's skyline is a dormant volcano, Diamond Head – a giant crater indented

©Getty: sorincolac



HONOLULU

## Essential information

Make use of the excellent public transport, or use the Uber app to hire a taxi – ideal for getting about the city.

### Best time to visit

*April to October*

### Time zone

UTC-10

### Useful sites

[WWW.GOHAUAI.COM](http://WWW.GOHAUAI.COM)

[WWW.HAWAII-GUIDE.COM](http://WWW.HAWAII-GUIDE.COM)

[WWW.VISITTHEUSA.CO.UK/DESTINATION/HONOLULU](http://WWW.VISITTHEUSA.CO.UK/DESTINATION/HONOLULU)



into the landscape of Oahu. On your visit, take the 30-minute hike up to the summit for splendid views over the island, and from there catch a bus to Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve. This is where you can experience the best in coral reef snorkelling – swimming among colourful and varied marine life and impressive coral formations. If you're lucky enough, you might even spot the captivating green sea turtle swimming around the shores of the bay.

Visiting Honolulu during the start and end of its summer season is recommended (April to May and September to October). During these months, you'll experience warm, sunny weather outside of the busier peak tourist season. Hotel prices will also be lower, and the surf scene will be quieter as well.



# LA PAZ

WITH DESTINATION RESTAURANTS, JAW-DROPPING VIEWS AND COEXISTING CULTURES, BOLIVIA'S SKY-HIGH CITY IS AS VARIED AS IT IS MAGNIFICENT

Sitting in the shadow of the cloud-splitting Mount Illimani, Bolivia's administrative capital, La Paz, clings to a cauldron-like crater 3,500 metres (11,480 feet) above sea level. The dramatic locale, in the heart of the Andean peaks, is the unlikely setting for a city that erupts into a sea of red-brick houses, studded by glassine skyscrapers and colonial-era domed churches. The blend of architecture is mirrored by the city's colourful collision of cultures and beliefs – incense-filled Catholic churches are passed by bowler-hatted cholitas, making offerings to Pachamama, the Incan goddess of fertility.

Curiosity leads travellers to the centuries-old Mercado de las Brujas, known as the Witches' Market. Here, locals sell traditional Aymara talismans alongside hand-made potions to improve lovemaking or ease a broken heart, as well as dried llama fetuses – which Andean belief dictates should be buried in the foundations

of new homes as an offering to the gods. A short walk away, the domes of Iglesia de San Francisco dominate the lively Plaza San Francisco. Hewn from rock, the church's exterior blends Catholic and indigenous imagery, with carvings of twisting vines, hissing snakes and ceremonial masks, alongside dragons, flowers and birds. Within, the interior is brought to life with gold leaf and intricate woodwork. Just north lies Lanza Market, where fruit stalls and food stands tout steaming empanadas, fresh juices and skewers of anticucho, or cow's heart, to hungry passersby.

A little further north, the cobbled Calle Jaén is lined with well-preserved 18th-century buildings, charming boutiques, independent galleries and cool cafes. Five of the city's museums can also be found here, including Museo de Instrumentos Musicales and Museo de Metales Preciosos.

Elsewhere, cable cars venture skywards to El Alto, home to Bolivia's largest open-air market.

While the journey offers up panoramic views of the city, the bazaar hums with locals bartering over everything from cakes to cars and dresses to deckchairs. For a break from the hectic city streets, the eerie Valle de la Luna, or Moon Valley, calls – a labyrinth of jagged rock formations and towering pinnacles. Meanwhile, 11 kilometres (seven miles) west, Muela del Diablo offers an easy half-day hike, with the volcanic peak overlooking the city and valley below.

Diversity also weaves its way through the city's culinary offerings. Opened by multi-award-winning Noma's co-founder, Gustu offers seasonally inspired, and decidedly daring, five, seven and 15-course tasting menus – featuring succulent slivers of llama loin, smoked trout from the country's Lake Titicaca and ostrich tartare. Across town, Ali Pacha serves up fine-dining vegan feasts of crispy palm hearts, Andean tuber and sweet quinoa that look like miniature works of art.

The El Alto district offers stunning views over La Paz and the surrounding Andean peaks

 **LA PAZ**

## Essential information

Those struggling to banish altitude sickness should try coca tea.

### Best time to visit

*April and October to avoid the rainy season*

### Time zone

UTC-4

### Useful sites

[WWW.MINCULTURAS.GOB.BO](http://WWW.MINCULTURAS.GOB.BO)  
[WWW.ATIXHOTEL.COM](http://WWW.ATIXHOTEL.COM)  
[WWW.GUSTU.BO](http://WWW.GUSTU.BO)





São Paulo's See  
Metropolitan  
Cathedral sits  
at the heart of  
the city



©Getty/wsfurlan

# SÃO PAULO

**A COSMOPOLITAN MELTING POT OF CULTURE AND CUISINE,  
COMPLEMENTED BY A THRIVING CLUBBING SCENE**

Brazil's biggest city is a place bursting with energy. It offers soaring skylines, a vibrant and cosmopolitan culture, amazing food, an unmatched party scene boasting innumerable underground bars and clubs, fantastic museums, and stunning architecture.

Orient yourself to the dynamics of São Paulo by immersing yourself in the everyday sights, smells and tastes of the native Paulistanos at Mercado Municipal, an urban market in a hall set with colourful stained-glass windows. Here you can treat yourself to a taste of the local cuisine as you roam the stalls and sample meats, pastries and other tasty snacks.

For an aerial view of the city, head to one of São Paulo's best known buildings, the Edifício Copan, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, which opens its rooftop a couple of times a day during

weekdays. If you want to see the hustle and bustle of the city continue into the night, you've got plenty of options when it comes to places to drink and dance. The bohemian neighbourhood of Vila Madalena is known for its nightlife, and you can enjoy some traditional samba at Grazie a Dio!. Electronica fans can visit D-Edge in Barra Funda; rockers Café Piu Piu in Bixiga; and jazz aficionados Bourbon Street on Rua dos Chanés. To combine your partying with a spectacular nighttime view of the city, head to PanAm Club. It's located on top of the Maksoud Plaza hotel, where the helipad is used as a smoking area. If you've not cottoned on, this city will have no problem catering to your tastes when it comes to a night out, whatever they may be.

Don't worry if you're not a party animal – São Paulo has plenty of culture to offer as well.

**“THE BOHEMIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD OF VILA  
MADALENA IS KNOWN FOR ITS NIGHTLIFE”**

 **SÃO PAULO**

## Essential information

Clubs and bars tend to operate on a tab system, usually giving you a piece of paper or card called a comanda. Lose it and you may face a big fine.

### Best time to visit

*March to May or October  
to November*

### Time zone

UTC-3

### Useful sites

[THEATROMUNICIPAL.ORG.BR/EN](http://THEATROMUNICIPAL.ORG.BR/EN)  
[PINACOTECA.ORG.BR](http://PINACOTECA.ORG.BR)  
[MOSTEIRO.ORG.BR](http://MOSTEIRO.ORG.BR)



Monasterio São Bento is a stunning church built in 1598 that will awe you with its wonderful stained-glass windows and intricate internal decoration. Even if you're not planning on taking in a performance, the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo is another must-see for lovers of architecture, showcasing a mix of Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical and Art Nouveau styles.

The Pinacoteca do Estado, the oldest museum in the city, is another impressive building, but we recommend taking a step inside too to see its collection of nearly 10,000 pieces of Brazilian art, ranging from the 19th century up to the present day. The striking Museu de Arte de São Paulo, a modernist construction of concrete and glass, houses an impressive collection of Western art from the likes of Goya and Manet, as well as art from Brazilian painters. São Paulo really is a place for everyone.



# SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

A PICTURESQUE CITY WITH CHARM, ROMANCE, AND EYE-POPPING ARCHITECTURE

One of the most beautiful cities in Mexico, if not the world, is to be found nestled in the heart of the country in the state of Guanajuato. Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, the city is known for its stunning colonial architecture, cobbled streets and cosmopolitan feel.

Wandering the old streets of San Miguel's historic centre, which has remained almost unchanged for 250 years, you can't help but stumble across architectural marvels. But make sure you don't miss the city's most famous building – its parish church, the Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel. This 17th-century church is famous for its characteristic pastel pink towers and its incredible neo-Gothic facade, added in 1880. This is far from the only church worth a visit in the city. Oratorio de San Felipe Neri showcases a mix of Baroque and indigenous styles and dates from the 18th century. Inside the church, you

can find an extravagant chapel from 1735 called the Santa Casa de Loreto and a series of 33 oil paintings depicting the life of San Felipe Neri, who founded the Oratorio Catholic order.

Return to the city's historic centre and its main square of El Jardin in the evening to see its architecture illuminated and hear mariachi music floating through the air as you immerse yourself in the city's romanticism and enjoy the many great bars and restaurants in the area.

It's worth taking a trip north of the city for one more church, which features stunning murals, chiefly created by Antonio Martínez de Pocasangre, earning it the moniker of Mexico's Sistine Chapel. The Sanctuary of Atotonilco plays an important part in Mexican history, with icon of the Mexican independence movement Ignacio Allende marrying in the church in 1802 and later taking the shrine's banner as the flag of the independence rebels.

There are a great selection of museums to choose from in the city. On the one hand, you can take in the fine arts at Escuela de Bellas Artes, a former monastery which features murals from Pedro Martínez and rotating temporary exhibitions featuring local artists. For something a bit different, we'd recommend Museo La Esquina. The museum features a collection of toys from across Mexico that offers a picture of Mexico and its culture through play.



©Getty/ferrantraite

## SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

### Essential information

If you're lucky enough to get an invitation to a Mexican's home, know that being on time is considered rude.

#### Best time to visit

*End of October (for the Day of the Dead festival)*

#### Time zone

UTC-6

#### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITSANMIGUEL.TRAVEL](http://WWW.VISITSANMIGUEL.TRAVEL)  
[WWW.ELCHARCO.ORG.MX](http://WWW.ELCHARCO.ORG.MX)  
[WWW.MUSEOLAESQUINA.MX](http://WWW.MUSEOLAESQUINA.MX)



**ABOVE RIGHT:** The stunning skyline of San Miguel de Allende with the famous Parroquia de San Miguel Arcángel standing tall

**BELOW:** This kind of colour is typical of the streets you'll see while roaming the city



©Getty/bpperry



# HAVANA

## CUBA'S COMMUNIST HOTSPOT IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

It's hard to believe that this island paradise in the Caribbean nearly brought about the end of the world as we know it. Nevertheless, it was in Cuba's capital city of Havana that the country's new communist president, Fidel Castro, watched Soviet warships sail closer to his shores and worried whether the American response would spark a nuclear war.

Despite lying only 177 kilometres (110 miles) south of Key West, the result of those tense 13 days in October 1962 – now known as the Cuban Missile Crisis – was to plunge the island nation into 50 years of isolation. Cuba and its capital developed an air of mystery as it closed its borders in response to international trade embargoes. For a fascinating but admittedly one-sided look at this era of Cuban history, take a trip to the Museum of the Revolution housed in Havana's Presidential Palace. Back on the streets,

billboards and murals of revolutionary heroes like Che Guevara can still be spotted, although there are surprisingly few depictions of Fidel Castro in his iconic olive-green military fatigues – the first president tried to prevent a cult of personality developing around him, and his wishes have been largely respected since his death.

As Havana's seclusion comes to an end, the communist propaganda is being squeezed out by a thriving street-art scene, with graffiti and murals found in almost every nook and cranny. However, the effect of the city's long isolation is still perfectly visible on its roads, where 1950s American convertibles share the lanes with Soviet-era Ladas. No car is disposed of here until it has truly hit the end of the road, the result of a make-do-and-mend attitude that car owners had to adopt when automotive imports dried up. The colourful tail fins of luxury

**"NO CAR IS DISPOSED OF HERE UNTIL IT HAS TRULY HIT THE END OF THE ROAD"**



**ABOVE:** The Malecón esplanade is a popular hangout for both tourists and locals, especially during evenings

Cadillacs and Chevrolets may look like lovingly preserved jewels, but under the bonnet the cars are more like Frankenstein's monster, with parts cannibalised from any source by ingenious mechanics. Try flagging down a taxi or renting a self-drive to experience life behind the wheel on Havana's relatively quiet streets.

Havana's colourful history began long before Castro and his gang of communist cronies;

### HAVANA

#### Essential information

When making purchases, check whether the price is in Cuban convertible pesos (CUC) or Cuban pesos (CUP).

#### Best time to visit

*December to May (to avoid the rain and hurricane seasons)*

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[WWW.CUBATRAVEL.CU/EN/DESTINATIONS/HAVANA-CUBA](http://WWW.CUBATRAVEL.CU/EN/DESTINATIONS/HAVANA-CUBA)  
[WWW.VISITCUBA.COM/?CITIES/HAVANA](http://WWW.VISITCUBA.COM/?CITIES/HAVANA)  
[WWW.GOV.UK/FOREIGN-TRAVEL-ADVICE/CUBA](http://WWW.GOV.UK/FOREIGN-TRAVEL-ADVICE/CUBA)







©Getty/ferrantraite

**ABOVE:** El Capitolio, or the National Capital, is one of the most visited buildings in Havana

**BOTTOM LEFT:** Peeling paint and classic cars are a clue that Havana suffered during half a century of economic sanctions

for more than four centuries, the city was a valuable possession of the Spanish empire. Explore the pre-revolutionary past in the Old Town surrounding the harbour, a must-see for every visitor to the city. Several fortresses were constructed to protect treasure-laden galleons as they crossed the Atlantic from the New World to the Old, of which La Cabaña is probably the best preserved for visitors. Each evening a cannon fires at 9pm, a relic of the era when the city gates were closed overnight.

Some of the Old Town may be crumbling due to decades of neglect, but several buildings continue to stand proud. San Cristóbal Cathedral and the Gran Teatro are two of the finest examples of baroque architecture in the Americas, while the National Capitol is a neoclassical masterpiece that bears more than a passing resemblance to the rival Capitol across the Straits of Florida, although its inspiration was actually the Pantheon in Paris.

Havana is a kaleidoscopic city, a riotous mish-mash of clashing colours and styles. It's easy to be overwhelmed in the rush from one historical sight to another, so be sure to leave time to take it all in. Take a seafront stroll along El Malecón

alongside spellbound tourists and relaxing locals. Browse the wares on offer from the antique and book vendors in Plaza de Armas. Listen to the salsa and jazz drifting out of houses, bars and clubs. Wander El Prado, the long boulevard dividing Old Havana from the downtown district, home to a wealth of cafes and restaurants. Sip a Cuba libre or a mojito as you watch the world pass by.

Speaking of rum-based drinks, for a true taste of the Cuban capital, make sure your tippie is made with Havana Club. The Museum of Rum, operated by Havana Club, takes guests on a tour of the rum-making process, and ends with the opportunity to savour a shot of the real thing. For another famous Havana marque, head to the Partagás Cigar Factory. Here you'll see the hand-rolled cigars in production, and the lectern where news is read to the workers on the rolling floor for 30 minutes each day.

The imparting of news to workers as they toil at a state-owned factory has a whiff of George Orwell's 1984 to it, but modern Havana has shed the excesses of communist authoritarianism and re-emerged from international isolation with its arms open in welcome. The Caribbean's fourth-largest city is still adapting to the modern world, and retains an exhilarating mix of old and new, so be sure to experience it before it loses its peculiar time-warped charm.



©Hemis / Alamy

## THE ART FACTORY

For an exciting glimpse of modern Havana, head to the disused cooking oil plant that has been redesigned as the Fábrica de Arte Cubano, the Cuban Art Factory, an art gallery and nightclub rolled into one.

The huge building is split into different rooms, all of which are begging to be explored. Some contain revellers dancing to modern tunes, others host salsa or ballroom dancing lessons. Some are set up like a bar, offering a chance for conversation over a reasonably priced cocktail, others are more like a cafe with delicious pastries. Between each, the meandering corridors are filled with artists' pieces and installations, with a chance to see artists in residence working on their next creations.

Whatever your mood and whatever your style of nightlife, chances are the labyrinthine Art Factory will have a place that suits – just make sure you arrive early to avoid the crowds.

**ABOVE:** The Cuban Art Factory operates from state-owned property but with artistic freedom to challenge existing attitudes



# CHICAGO

## IMMERSE YOURSELF IN A CULTURE OF MUSIC, ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE CITY BREAK

Situated at the southern base of Lake Michigan, Chicago is a city that will keep on surprising you with every turn. The birthplace of its own genre of blues music and the world-renowned deep-dish pizza, Chicago is the perfect city for music lovers and foodies alike. This is a city that boasts a massive sporting culture, home to all five of the major US sports: baseball, basketball, American football, soccer and ice hockey. Check the calendar before you travel to Chicago to find out which home games are playing while you're there, and if you have enough time it's worth grabbing a seat at any one of those events, as the experience will leave a lasting impression.

Chicago will not only satisfy your thirst for sport, but also for music and comedy. Well-known for its blues music, lively comedy clubs and entertainment, such venues can be found dotted all over the city. To visitors, Chicago offers an abundance of sights and attractions during the day that will capture your imagination and keep you exploring through to nighttime. From the historical Field Museum displaying rare dinosaur fossils, to the remarkable, neo-Gothic Tribune Tower on North Michigan Avenue. The Tower, made up of a collection of fragments from around the world that form part of the building's outer shell, is an architectural monument that adorns the city skyline. Dominating skyscrapers will keep you constantly gazing upwards, and during your visit to Chicago, don't miss the chance to venture up the second largest skyscraper in the States, the Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower). Step out onto the 'Ledge' of the Skydeck at 412 metres (1,353 feet) for spectacular views of the city. Entry to the Willis Tower costs £20 (\$25) for adults and £13 (\$17) for children (ages 3-11).

If you have a spare hour or two while visiting Chicago, make sure you take a stroll into Millennium Park, which is home to Cloud Gate, a giant reflective bean-shaped art piece. If you're lucky enough, and if you have good timing, you might even be able to catch one of the exciting free live shows that are held regularly in the park throughout the summer. And to finish up a trip to Chicago, book yourself and one other a ticket to go up the John Hancock Center, a 100-storey skyscraper that towers over the city, with views over Lake Michigan from the 95th floor – the perfect spot for fine dining and cocktails while reminiscing over the day's events.



### CHICAGO

#### Essential information

Grab a CityPASS to see Chicago's top museums and attractions.

#### Best time to visit

*June to October*

#### Time zone

UTC-6



#### Useful sites

[WWW.ENJOYILLINOIS.COM/CHICAGO](http://WWW.ENJOYILLINOIS.COM/CHICAGO)

[WWW.CHOOSSECHICAGO.COM](http://WWW.CHOOSSECHICAGO.COM)

[WWW.SEATGEEK.COM/CITIES/CHICAGO/SPORTS](http://WWW.SEATGEEK.COM/CITIES/CHICAGO/SPORTS)

©Getty/franckreporter

Chicago is a beautiful city throughout the year, but it's particularly stunning in autumn (fall)

**BOTTOM LEFT:** The CTA train system operates overground and in subways throughout Chicago



©Getty/Menny



Known for its deep-pan pizza, this cheesy, tomato dish will keep you fuelled

©Getty/Wonyoung Kim / EyeEm



Salvador is the coastal gem where  
Brazilians come to party all year round

## SALVADOR

### Essential information

Pelourinho is the perfect base from which to explore Salvador's history, restaurants, bars and more.

#### Best time to visit

*December to March  
is high season.*

#### Time zone

UTC-3

#### Useful sites

[WWW.BAHIAEXPERIENCE.COM.BR/](http://WWW.BAHIAEXPERIENCE.COM.BR/)  
[SALVADOR-TOURS/](http://SALVADOR-TOURS/)  
[WWW.SALVADORDABAHIA.COM/EN](http://WWW.SALVADORDABAHIA.COM/EN)  
[WWW.BAHIA-CARNIVAL.INFO](http://WWW.BAHIA-CARNIVAL.INFO)



©Getty/sbk\_20d pictures

# SALVADOR

FROM CATHEDRALS TO COCKTAILS, BEACHES TO BEATS, SALVADOR HAS IT ALL

You are invited to the biggest party in the world. You'll have to fly to Salvador, the capital of Brazil's Bahia, but the long-haul flight will be oh so worth it when the Afro-Brazilian beats are pulsing in your ears, the rhythm overtakes your body and all thoughts of work, to-do lists and DIY are banished as you dance, drink and celebrate with 2.5 million other like-minded revellers. The six-day Bahian Carnival is held annually in Salvador either at the end of February or the beginning of March. It is by far the largest street party in the world, and is Fun with a capital F.

After all that partying, you'll be crying out for a little R & R. Lucky for you, Salvador is teeming with beautiful beaches and small seaside villages. Porto da Barra, located in the Barra neighbourhood, has been recognised as "one of the best beaches in the world", and is bookended with a white colonial fort on one side and a church on a hill on the other. About an hour's drive north of Salvador is Praia do Forte, which

is where Brazil's largest sea turtle conservation project runs. Book yourself onto a full-moon tour to witness baby turtles hatching on the beach.

Not in the mood to get sand between your toes? Then get your culture on, starting at Largo Terreiro de Jesus, a historical plaza located in the oldest part of the city. Wander the cobbled streets, soaking up the impressive architecture of the many cathedrals, churches and mansions. Then consider just how gosh-darn pretty the colonial buildings are with their Easter-egg pastel hues. Dulux colour match, anyone? One of the city's loveliest streets is undoubtedly Cruzeiro de São Francisco, which is home to the 18th-century São Francisco Church and Convent. The lavish gold, silver and precious-stone decorations will leave you in absolute awe. And that's before you've even craned your neck to see the incredible ceiling or ventured into the room carved entirely from wood and coated in gold that took African slaves 27 years to complete. It is truly spectacular.



**ABOVE:** The oldest part of Salvador is full of beautiful pastel-coloured, colonial-era architecture

Meander your way towards the seafront to Mercado Modelo. Previously the site of one of South America's earliest slave markets, it is now home to around 200 stalls selling local arts, crafts, trinkets and souvenirs. The popular yellow-buildinged market also houses food stalls, restaurants and bars. Did someone say caipirinha o'clock?

**"SALVADOR IS TEEMING WITH BEAUTIFUL BEACHES AND SMALL SEASIDE VILLAGES"**





# SAN FRANCISCO

HOME TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST INFAMOUS PRISONS, SAN FRANCISCO'S CHARMS MEAN YOU'LL NEVER WANT TO LEAVE

San Francisco is one of the world's most iconic cities. Beautiful weather, diverse inhabitants, an instantly recognisable landmark and a tourist destination that was once home to many of the country's most dangerous criminals make San Francisco one of Earth's must-visit destinations.

San Francisco, sitting as it does on a peninsula between San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean, is synonymous with the most spectacular of its entry points: the Golden Gate Bridge. The 227-metre (746-foot) high bridge was completed in 1937, so has been a fixture on the city's skyline for more than 80 years. To clear up confusion regarding the colour, Golden Gate refers to the mouth of the Bay, rather than the bridge itself. The bridge is more of a reddish-orange, which is due to a consulting engineer on the project liking the colour of the primer coat and sticking with that. Today it still stands proudly and majestically across the bay, both a practical way to cross over towards the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and up to Sacramento. You can walk across the bridge if you fancy the 2.7-kilometre (1.7-mile) walk, or you can hire a bike or car to cross its



The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the most instantly recognisable landmarks in the world

expanse. However, if you are driving, be aware that there will be a toll to pay, as is the case with the Bay Bridge, which links San Francisco to Oakland and is arguably a better place to get a good look at the city's most famous sight.

Rather selfishly, San Francisco has not one world-famous tourist attraction, but two. For decades, America's most hardened criminals were banged up in Alcatraz, trying to escape. Now, dozens of tours leave the Bayside every





**SAN FRANCISCO**

**\$4**

## Essential information

Hiring a car isn't recommended due to the difficulty of parking and the superb public transport network.

### Best time to visit

*September to November*

### Time zone

UTC-8

### Useful sites

[WWW.SFTRAVEL.COM](http://WWW.SFTRAVEL.COM)

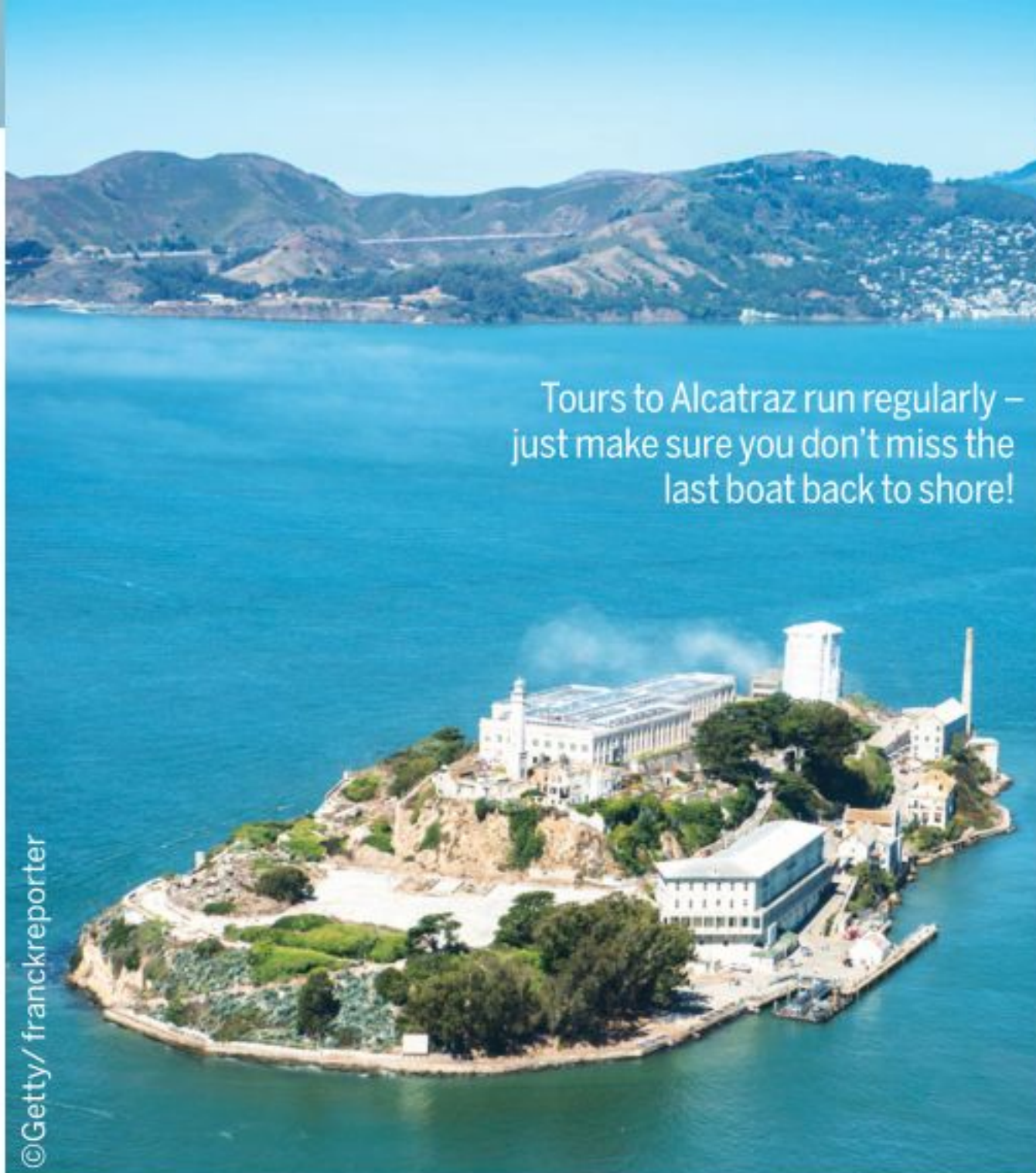
[WWW.VISITCALIFORNIA.COM/REGION/DISCOVER-SAN-FRANCISCO-BAY-AREA](http://WWW.VISITCALIFORNIA.COM/REGION/DISCOVER-SAN-FRANCISCO-BAY-AREA)

[WWW.NPS.GOV/ALCA/INDEX.HTM](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/ALCA/INDEX.HTM)



day to take interested tourists to this iconic rocky outcrop. It was only operational for less than 30 years, decommissioned in 1963, but housed the likes of Al Capone and Robert 'Birdman' Stroud. You are at liberty to wander around the prison as much as you like, guided by a free audio tour that really adds an atmospheric element to proceedings. You can comfortably spend a good few hours exploring the prison, the gardens and the rock itself, but make sure you don't miss whatever talks are taking place in the canteen. These fascinating presentations give some meat to the bones of the audio tour, including an in-depth description of all the escape attempts that took place over the years. The journey to and from Alcatraz is an enjoyable hop in a small ferry, affording gorgeous views of the bay, the island, the bridges and the city itself.

Back on land, the waterside still dominates the city. Fisherman's Wharf, and specifically Pier 39, offers lots of restaurants, bars, ice cream stands, shops and tourist attractions. You might associate clam chowder most closely with the opposite coast of the USA, but San Francisco also has a strong chowder heritage, with its unique selling point being the sourdough bread bowl it is served in. The warmth of the chowder is welcome, given the stiff breeze that sweeps in off the bay. It's also worth a detour to Ghirardelli Square and the original Ghirardelli Ice Cream and Chocolate Shop, which has been a fixture in the city since the 1840s. Some of the most



Tours to Alcatraz run regularly – just make sure you don't miss the last boat back to shore!

famous residents of Pier 39 are a huge family of sea lions. Dozens of these marine mammals lie spread-eagled across floating platforms by the pier, unconcerned by the watching tourists. It's a thoroughly entertaining sight and sound, and a free alternative to visiting the San Francisco zoo.

Further aerial views of San Francisco can be enjoyed by scaling Coit Tower, a 64-metre (210-foot) structure that has stood overlooking the city since 1933.

Further inland is Golden Gate Park, a vast stretch of lawns, flowers and the California Academy of Sciences. For those of a literary mind, you might want to visit the Garden of Shakespeare's Flowers, a garden filled with every plant mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. To the east of the park you'll find the Haight-Ashbury district, birthplace of the hippie movement and home to vintage bookstores, quirky bars and a unique culture.

Yet another popular culture nod can be found in the Russian Hill area. Lombard Street is known as the world's most crooked street, consisting of eight hairpin bends down a steep hill. It is a quirky bit of construction and has featured in many a car-chase movie scene.

San Francisco is eccentric, welcoming, beautiful, LGBT-friendly, a bit pricey but totally

## GETTING AROUND

San Francisco has extreme highs and lows when it comes to topography, which you'll certainly need to factor in if you're planning on walking around the city. If the idea of all those hills is hellish for you, the city has a comprehensive and reasonable cable car and bus system that will take you from one end of San Francisco to the other. The cable car system in San Francisco is another must-do, being the world's last manually operated system. Watch out when crossing the road, however, as they are pretty quiet and able to change traffic lights rather quickly, so never take a chance if you see one coming across your path. It's also a lovely, if a little challenging, place to hire a bicycle, even if those hills certainly aren't for the faint-hearted!

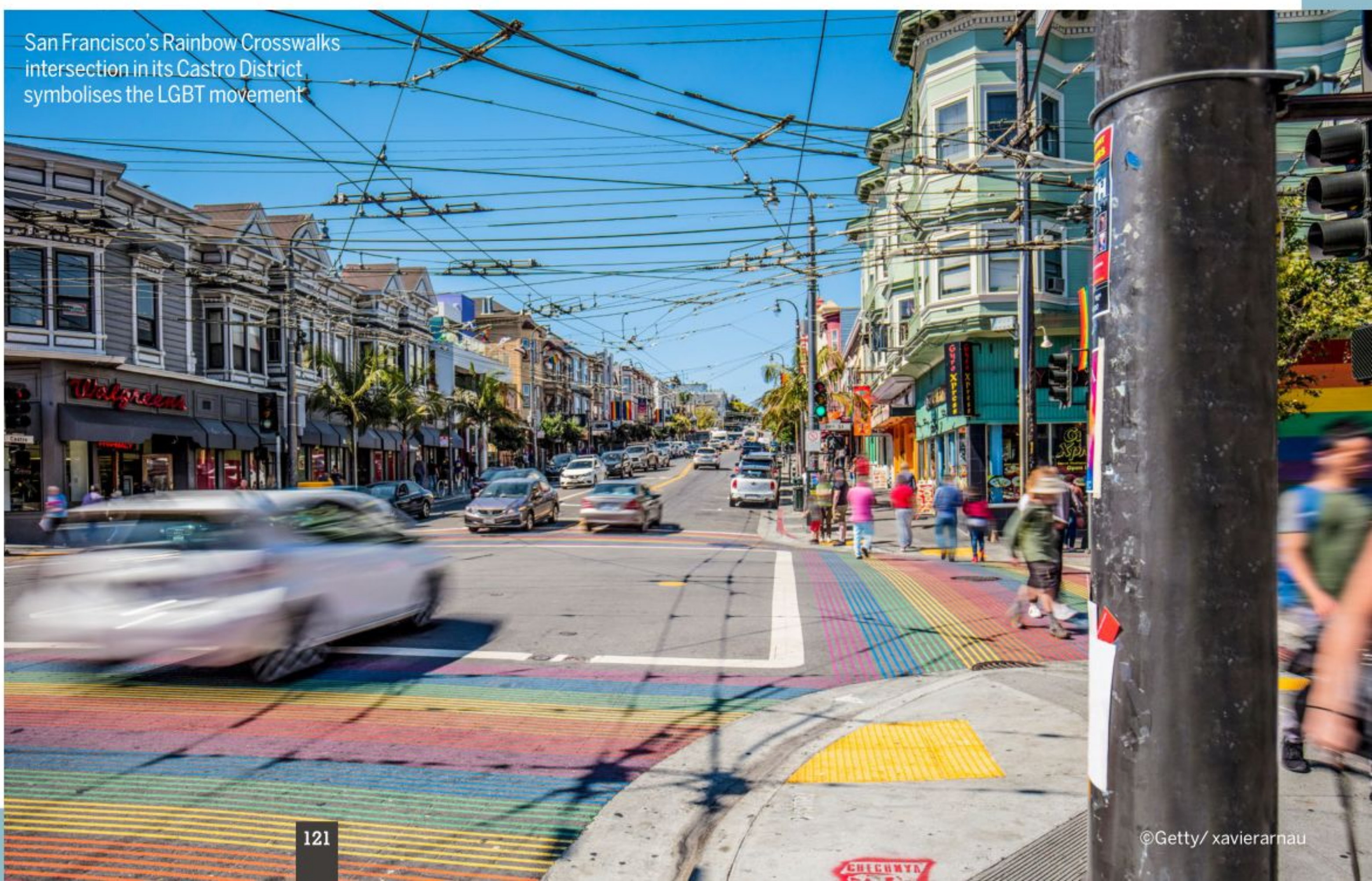


ABOVE: Cable cars are one of San Francisco's most endearing and enduring sights

worth it. You'll leave with the knowledge of having seen two of the planet's most iconic structures and the feeling of having visited somewhere that's like no other city in the world.

## "SAN FRANCISCO HAS NOT ONE WORLD-FAMOUS TOURIST ATTRACTION, BUT TWO"

San Francisco's Rainbow Crosswalks intersection in its Castro District symbolises the LGBT movement





Along the El Malecon cliffside route, you'll find malls, cafes and parks

## LIMA

### Essential information

Ask before photographing the locals – many will refuse to be snapped while others may request payment.

#### Best time to visit

*November to March, to avoid the thick fog, known as garúa, which blankets the city*

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[WWW.PERU.TRAVEL](http://WWW.PERU.TRAVEL)  
[WWW.PERUHOP.COM](http://WWW.PERUHOP.COM)  
[WWW.AMAZ.COM.PE](http://WWW.AMAZ.COM.PE)



# LIMA

## PERU'S COASTAL CAPITAL FUSES ANCIENT CULTURE WITH URBAN COOL AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE WITH UNRIVALLED NATURAL BEAUTY

Hugging the Pacific coast, Lima merges old-world charm with cultural gems and spectacular surf.

A melting pot of history and heritage thanks to the city's status as a major port, pre-Columbian pyramids rub shoulders with Spanish



ABOVE: Serving up pure Peruvian fare, the menu at Amaz features exotic Amazonian ingredients



ABOVE: In Plaza de Armas, trumpets and drums begin at noon each day, to mark the changing of the guard

monuments and Incan markets sit beside world-class ceviche spots.

Studded with grand squares, towering cathedrals and sherbet-hued mansions, the historic heart of old Lima is an architectural and cultural marvel. From its cobbled streets, travellers can explore the sprawling convent of Iglesia de Santo Domingo, before climbing its bell tower to take in panoramic views of the city.

A short walk southeast lies Plaza de Armas, also known as Plaza Mayor; home to government buildings, Lima's cathedral and the municipal palace. Intricately carved wooden balconies overlook the square from every angle, while the San Cristóbal Hill, crowned with an enormous cross, sits on the horizon. Heading west, Museo Larco lures visitors with its eclectic collection of erotic pottery and pre-Columbian art.

Further west, fringing the city's coast, crumbling emerald cliffs tumble into the Pacific Ocean. Snaking along the ridge, the ten-kilometre (six-mile) El Malecon coastal path weaves past manicured parks, open-air gyms, modern malls and quaint coffee shops – but it's the uninterrupted view of the ocean that really impresses. In the water below, surfers of all ages take to the board. For novices keen to

learn how to carve a wave, Lima's consistent yet predictable swell proves an ideal place to learn.

Back on dry land, the bohemian neighbourhood of Barranco offers up pristine 19th-century mansions, edgy cocktail bars and boutique shops. It's also home to acclaimed galleries, including the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo and MATE – a small museum founded by Mario Testino which showcases the photographer's work, alongside other Peruvian artists. The palm tree-studded enclave is also home to a slew of celebrated eateries, including Central, with its renowned 17-course tasting menu; and Isolina, a traditional tavern that serves up Peruvian soul food and meaty creole-inspired dishes.

The gastronomic journey unfolds across the city, traversing a string of world-class restaurants; like fine dining concept, Amaz, which dishes out unusual ingredients like giant Amazonian river snails and the exotic camu camu fruit. Meanwhile, ceviche connoisseurs head to Sequillo to secure one of just six seats at Al Toke Pez, a hole-in-the-wall that serves up some of the best raw fish in the city. Alternatively, chef Mitsuharu Tsumura presents Peruvian cuisine with a distinctly Japanese twist at Maido.



# CHARLESTON

DESPITE ITS DARK PAST, THIS JEWEL OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH IS NOW FULL OF COLOUR

South Carolina's oldest city exudes an old world charm that brings to mind fashionable Southern belles, well-mannered aristocrats and the American South's famed hospitality. It is a place full of class, character and beauty, but also offers history buffs the opportunity to explore the dark history behind Charleston's splendour.

Any visitor to Charleston has to set aside some time to explore the city's stunning historical district. Running alongside the Cooper and Ashley rivers, South of Broad is a historic neighbourhood full of fascinating architecture, with houses dating back to the early 1700s. The houses, many of which were built by wealthy plantation owners, are known for their beautiful gardens, framed with intricate iron gate-work. As if that wasn't enough, the area also offers spectacular views of the city's harbour.

The French Quarter is just as essential. Here, you can walk charming cobbled streets

and discover some of the city's most historic buildings – including the Pink House, built around 1712 and the French Huguenot Church, built in 1844 – among some fantastic galleries, museums and restaurants.

The French Quarter is also a great place to start learning about Charleston's past. The Old Slave Mart at 6 Chalmers Street was once an antebellum slave auction gallery, now dedicated to remembering the horror of slavery through exhibits, artefacts and oral recordings of former slave Elijah Green. You should also take a trip to the McLeod Plantation. This 15-hectare (37-acre) plantation offers an unflinching look at the reality of slavery and the broader history of the South through fascinating guided tours of a property that includes old slave houses, a cotton gin house, a cemetery and the former residence of the plantation owners that lived there.

Charleston has plenty more to offer history buffs, including horse-drawn carriage tours, the

Heyward-Washington House – where George Washington once stayed – and the remaining sections of Fort Sumter, a Union fort heavily shelled by the Confederates in the opening battle of the Civil War. However, while its history is a big part of its appeal, Charleston isn't stuck in the past. Cool microbreweries like Holy City Brewing; the dynamism of the bars and restaurants that line the hip Upper King Street; and cool festivals, such as September's showcase of African-American and Caribbean culture, the MOJA Arts Festival, and March's exciting Food & Wine Festival, show this seat of Southern history and tradition is a place where things are very much happening in the here and now.

**“WHILE HISTORY IS A BIG PART OF ITS APPEAL, CHARLESTON ISN'T STUCK IN THE PAST”**

A look at the kind of spectacular architecture you can expect to see while exploring the streets of Charleston

## CHARLESTON

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### Essential information

Charleston gets very expensive during events and festivals, so, unless you want to attend, time your trip to avoid these.

### Best time to visit

*March to May or  
September to November*

### Time zone

UTC-5

### Useful sites

[WWW.CHARLESTON.COM](http://WWW.CHARLESTON.COM)  
[WWW.OLDSOUTHCARRIAGE.COM](http://WWW.OLDSOUTHCARRIAGE.COM)  
[WWW.CHARLESTONMUSEUM.ORG](http://WWW.CHARLESTONMUSEUM.ORG)





# LOS ANGELES

THE HOME OF ENTERTAINMENT AND EXCITEMENT, LA IS DEDICATED TO THE FUN THINGS IN LIFE

Located on the south coast of California, USA, the city of LA is surrounded by beautiful beaches, rolling mountains, alpine lakes and is at the heart of the entertainment industry. LA's glamorous atmosphere begins and ends with the iconic 'Hollywood' sign. Perched on Mount Lee, in the Hollywood Hills area of the Santa Monica Mountains, this American landmark and cultural icon towers over the city at just over 13 metres (45 feet) tall. Although at first it spelt out 'Hollywoodland' and was part of an ad

campaign for a suburban housing development, today it simply reads 'Hollywood' and remains as an evocative symbol to the rest of the world that LA is the place where dreams come true. Nothing reaffirms this message more than the equally famous Walk of Fame – over 2,600 terrazzo and brass stars stretch along 15 blocks of Hollywood Boulevard and three blocks of Vine Street reflecting the monumental achievements of those in the entertainment industry, from iconic actress Marilyn Monroe to Walt Disney's big-eared mascot, Mickey Mouse.

In LA, there's more than one way to see the stars. At the Griffith Observatory, found on the south-facing slope of Mount Hollywood in Griffith Park, visitors can gaze upon the cosmos as well as find the best views of the Los Angeles basin. This observatory offers a planetarium as well as a number of exhibits and public telescopes to allow you to stargaze from the most star-studded area in the world. Griffith Park itself boasts more

than 4,000 acres of natural chaparral-covered terrain and landscaped parkland, making it an impressive landscape any time of the day. For a stunning sunset, check out Santa Monica Pier. This double-jointed pier at the foot of Colorado Avenue in Santa Monica is more than 100 years old, but is bursting with amusement arcades, restaurants and a ferris wheel for those breathtaking views across the water. Of course, LA is the birthplace of Disney and is home to the famed amusement parks such as Disneyland Park and Walt Disney Studios, whose deep-rooted themes in childhood memories make them an iconic part of LA.

One such place to see a more 'modest' side to LA is at the Original Farmers Market. Built in the 1930s, the building served as an actual farmers' market, but visit it now and you'll find a unique cluster of boutiques, grocers, repair shops and food stalls to peruse as you wind down from the hustle and bustle of Hollywood.



The evocative 'Hollywood' sign which towers over LA was meant to be a temporary addition to the landscape in 1923, but remains today

©Getty/Raymond Boyd

**"VISITORS CAN GAZE UPON THE COSMOS AND FIND THE BEST VIEWS OF THE LA BASIN"**

LA is famed for its palm tree-lined boulevards and spectacular views over the Pacific Ocean

**LOS ANGELES**

**Essential information**

Don't forget sun-cream in the midst of all the fun, as temperatures soar all year round.

**Best time to visit**  
March to May

**Time zone**  
UTC-8

**Useful sites**  
[WWW.VISITCALIFORNIA.COM](http://WWW.VISITCALIFORNIA.COM)  
[WWW.DISCOVERLOSANGELES.COM](http://WWW.DISCOVERLOSANGELES.COM)  
[WWW.CA.GOV/VISITING](http://WWW.CA.GOV/VISITING)

©Getty/DutcherAerials



# MEXICO CITY

**BRIMMING WITH LATIN CHARM, RIVETING HISTORY AND A MODERN CULTURAL RENAISSANCE, MEXICO CITY HAS IT ALL**

ying in the shadow of mountains and volcanoes, Mexico's capital was founded in prophecy. The Aztecs were told that their god would give them a sign of where to build a great city – an eagle eating a snake, perched atop a cactus. The vision was fulfilled on an island in Lake Texcoco, the swamp was filled with earth, and Mexico City was born.

Home to the Aztecs for centuries, and later a key seat in the Spanish conquest, for many, the journey into Mexico City's storied past starts at Centro Histórico's Plaza del Zócalo, the city's political and religious heart. Built directly atop of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, the 16th-century Catedral Metropolitana dominates the skyline, its twin spires mottled by the centuries. Across the marble square is Palacio Nacional, its exceptional architecture, interior gardens and vivid murals chronicling the Mexican adventure.

Mexico City's charm stems from its diversity – from drinking in backdoor pulquerías and wrestling at Lucha Libre, to watching the Sun set from the skyscraping Torre Latinoamericana. The

city's staggering 300 markets are no exception. At the bustling Mercado de la Merced traders hawk everything from organic fruits and off-brand clothing to neon-lit statues of the Virgin Mary. Those seeking sustenance are overwhelmed with options, from steaming Oaxacan stew and aromatic tamales (filled dough wraps) to pig-brain tacos and spicy grasshoppers.

There's an old saying in Mexico – "Without corn, there is no country" – which still rings true today. Beyond the markets, food takes on an omnipresent role, and street food – particularly the taco – is king. Each day, hungry workers flock to hole-in-the-wall taquerias, serving their own iterations of tacos al pastor – spit-grilled pork carved directly onto corn tortilla and topped with onion, coriander, spicy salsas and fresh lime.

To the west, fine-dining restaurants elevate Mexico's deep-rooted culinary tradition. On a tree-lined street in upmarket Polanco, the country's top chef, Enrique Olvera, reimagines Mexican street food in complex tasting menus at Pujol, considered one of the best restaurants in

the world. Bellies full, those seeking respite from the frenzy find solace in Bosque de Chapultepec. Nearly twice the size of Central Park, it's the emerald in the crown of the city's many public spaces, and a welcome oasis from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Alternatively, Coyoacán is home to trendy cafes and sultry cantinas, as well as Casa Azul, the house where celebrated artist Frida Kahlo was born, lived and died. Kahlo spent Sundays on colourful trajineras, boating down the ancient canals of Xochimilco between floating gardens, transported to a jungle river, awash with mariachi bands, tacos and mezcal.



**"TRADERS HAWK EVERYTHING FROM ORGANIC FRUITS TO NEON STATUES OF VIRGIN MARY"**

## MEXICO CITY

### Essential information

For money-conscious travellers, many museums offer free entry on Sundays.

#### Best time to visit

*March to May, for the best weather*

#### Time zone

UTC-6

#### Useful sites

[WWW.ELMORO.MX](http://WWW.ELMORO.MX)  
[WWW.TORRELATINOAMERICANA.COM.MX](http://WWW.TORRELATINOAMERICANA.COM.MX)  
[WWW.PUJOL.COM.MX](http://WWW.PUJOL.COM.MX)



**ABOVE:** Head to trendy Coyoacán for all of your street food needs

During the Aztec period, Mexico City was built over a lake, by depositing tonnes of soil into the lagoon







©Getty/Westend61

## LAS VEGAS

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### Essential information

UK citizens must apply for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization) to visit the US.

#### Best time to visit

*March to May and September to November (to avoid the heat)*

#### Time zone

UTC-8



#### Useful sites

[WWW.VEGAS.COM/TOURS](http://WWW.VEGAS.COM/TOURS)

[WWW.CIRQUEDUSOLEIL.COM/LAS-VEGAS](http://WWW.CIRQUEDUSOLEIL.COM/LAS-VEGAS)

[NOCOVERNIGHTCLUBS.COM/NIGHTCLUBS](http://NOCOVERNIGHTCLUBS.COM/NIGHTCLUBS)

A visit to Vegas wouldn't be complete without a trip to the iconic Vegas sign

# LAS VEGAS

SEEN FROM SPACE, LAS VEGAS SHINES BRIGHT, BUT IT'S MORE THAN LIGHTS THAT MAKE SIN CITY STAND OUT

Bright neon signs, flashy casinos and getting hitched in front of Elvis. Mention Las Vegas and these are probably the first things that spring to mind. And yes, it is all of these things; the city really does dazzle. According to NASA, if you're looking down at Earth from space, it's the brightest location on the planet. Because of its reputation, most people either love or hate the idea of visiting, but it should definitely be on your bucket list because, whoever you are, this surprising ray of light has something for you.

Vegas really is unlike anywhere else. The six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch down Las Vegas Boulevard, known as the 'Strip', is lined with some of the biggest hotels; it's as if you've landed in a glamorous theme park that takes you around the globe. Take a trip to Venice at The Venetian, gliding down the canal on a gondola past old Italian villas, or see the Statue of Liberty at New York, New York. The 30-storey pyramid

at the Luxor will transport you to Ancient Egypt, while at the Paris Las Vegas Hotel you can sit at a café with a view of the Eiffel Tower. From the dancing fountains at the Bellagio to the iconic Vegas sign, the sights and attractions are jaw-dropping.

Vegas truly is a world of glitz and glamour. With more than 40 million visitors a year, the city has earned its title as the entertainment and gambling capital of the world. It has some of the biggest casinos and nightclubs. The largest of these, Sunset Station Hotel and Casino, is located off the strip, but other popular hotels for gambling include the Wynn and the Venetian. If you like slot machines, head to the ARIA; for table games the Golden Nugget has the most choice; and if you're not a gambler try LEVEL UP, the gaming lounge at the MGM Grand.

If you'd rather dance the night away, there's more than enough choice. See world-famous

DJs at Hakkasan, one of the world's biggest nightclubs, or indulge in opulence at the Wynn's XS Nightclub. If you want to enjoy a drink in a more intimate setting, the bars are just as exceptional. For sheer luxury, visit Chandelier at the Cosmopolitan where you can order a cocktail under a giant chandelier made from two million crystals, or relax at the lavish Vesper Bar, which is decked out in chrome and mirror tiles. For breathtaking views of the city, check out the bar at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

The city is also known for its wild pool parties. The Rehab Beach Club at the Hard Rock Hotel is where it all started, but again the choice is huge with epic pool parties like Wet Republic at the MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay.

But entertainment doesn't stop there. Some of the world's best musical artists hold regular shows, and don't miss Cirque du Soleil's 'O', the water-based spectacular at the Mirage.





©Getty/James Reeve

Take a trip in a gondola and experience a taste of Italy at The Venetian

## "DOWNTOWN IS THE HISTORIC HEART OF THE CITY"

Despite its reputation, Vegas actually has a great deal of history. Downtown is the historic heart of the city where you'll find the Golden Nugget, one of the city's oldest casinos, the Neon Museum and the Mob Museum, which takes you back to a time when gangsters ran the casinos. These are all highly recommended as they highlight just how far Las Vegas has come: from the desert home of Native Americans to the fastest growing city in America.

Visitors can take a short drive to one of the seven wonders of the engineering world – Hoover Dam – and see Lake Mead, the nation's largest reservoir. Hoover Dam is steeped in history. It was built in 1935 after gambling was legalised, giving the city the power to light up the casinos, which were at the time run by the mob.

If you want to explore other areas of natural beauty, Red Rock Canyon is only 20 minutes away, and the south rim of the Grand Canyon is a five-hour drive.

You wouldn't think to mention Vegas as a top food destination, but it is. You can find food from every culture, from pizza and sushi to tacos and steak. You can't go to Vegas without having a steak. Try SW Steakhouse, one of only three restaurants in the US that serves authentic Kobe beef. Vegas is known for its buffets as this was a way to keep gamblers in the casinos by providing large quantities of cheap food. With more than 70 buffets it'll be hard to choose one, but the Baccanal Buffet at Caesar's Palace is highly ranked. The city is also famous for its brunches – make sure you go to Hash House a Go Go. If you've got cash to splash, the city

has the highest volume of restaurants run by celebrated chefs, and is becoming known for its fine-dining. If you can only treat yourself once, taste 'Chef of the Century' Joel Robuchon's food at MGM Grand.

Adrenaline junkies will have lots to keep them busy. Jump off the 108th floor of the Stratosphere hotel at SkyJump or, if rollercoasters are more your thing, the Canyon Blaster at Circus Circus is the world's only indoor double loop, double corkscrew. There's also the Manhattan Express at New York, New York and Desperado at Buffalo Bill's. Adventurers can go indoor skydiving, mountain biking and much more along the Strip and further afield. Sports fanatics can bet at Caesar's Palace or play golf at championship golf courses including Bali Hai Golf Club.

Shop in style at some stunning shopping venues, from the Forum shops at Greco-Roman themed Caesar's Palace to the Grand Canal Shoppes at The Venetian. For luxury shopping take a trip to Crystals at CityCentre; for popular brands there are more than 200 stores at the Fashion Show Mall; and if you're after a discount try the Las Vegas North Premium Outlets.

Vegas also has some of the best spas in the world. Be pampered like a queen with a euphoric synchronised massage at Encore, a gemstone facial at ARIA or skin treatment using 24-carat gold at Qua Baths & Spa.

They say that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, and whether you get up to mischief of some sort or not, there's definitely at least one reason that you should stay in Vegas and just see what happens.



©Getty/Stefano Politi Markovina

## FAMILY FUN

Despite its reputation, Vegas is not just for late-night revellers. There's plenty to keep the whole family entertained. If the kids want a bit of excitement, the Adventure Dome Theme Park at Circus Circus and the High Roller Observation Wheel are great fun. For something extra-special, visit Fremont Street to zipline through the indoor mall or see the Viva vision light and music show. For animal lovers, try Shark Reef Aquarium or Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden And Dolphin Habitat. The hotels also provide plenty of child-friendly entertainment from Bellagio's Conservation and Botanical Gardens to the Tournament of Kings at the medieval-themed Excalibur Hotel. Let them play in a treehouse at the Downtown Container or channel their inner superheroes at the Avengers STATION Museum. If your youngsters have a sweet tooth, take them to Hershey's Chocolate or M&M World. The fun is endless.

The Las Vegas skyline is definitely worth seeing at night



©Getty/RebeccaAng



# MEDELLÍN

FROM VIOLENT TO VIBRANT, THIS COLOMBIAN CITY HAS TURNED ITSELF ON ITS HEAD

If you've been binge-watching *Narcos*, the Colombian city of Medellín will already be occupying your mind. As will one of the most powerful drug lords ever to have existed, shedloads of cocaine, and some dodgy facial hair. Medellín was once known as the most dangerous city on Earth, where corruption, violence and disorder reigned. Fast-forward to the present day and it's now a vibrant tourist destination, where visitors are invited to get their zen on in Barefoot Park, soak up the impressive artworks in the Museo de Antioquia, or – coffee snobs rejoice – sit and enjoy a steaming brew, made from locally grown, harvested and roasted beans, in Pergamino Cafe.

After a caffeine fix, you'll want to explore what else this dynamic city has to offer. Botero Plaza is home to 23 playful bronze sculptures by local artist Fernando Botero. Rubbing one of these statues – whether the chubby chap, lardy lady, rotund Roman soldier or jowly giant – is said to

bring love and good fortune. They're a little scant in the clothes department, however, so watch where you put your hands if you want to avoid any raised eyebrows!

From without a stitch to stinking rich, you may want to check out Medellín's wealthiest neighbourhood, El Poblado. Hit the shops in one of its huge malls – Santafé, Oviedo or El Tesoro, the latter boasting more than 400 outlets and a scenic view over the city. The cool bars (like Burdo and Envy Rooftop) are perfect for a cocktail after a hard day's retail therapy. If, though, you're more flowers than fashion, more botanics than boutiques, flutter over to Jardín Botánico, which holds 600 species of trees and plants inside its 34-acre oasis, complete with lake, herbarium and butterfly enclosure.

Many tours are on offer in and around Medellín – historic tours, coffee tours, graffiti tours, Pablo Escobar tours – but perhaps the best (and cheapest) way to see the city is via cable car.



©Getty/ holgs

**ABOVE:** Medellín is famous for its incredible Christmas lights – also known as El Alumbrado – making it a great time to visit the city

Operating four lines, the Metrocable runs high above Medellín, with the best scenery along the central stretch, between the Industriales and Acevedo stations.

Although Medellín has worked hard to become the city it is today, its past is not forgotten. To learn about its harrowing history, visit Casa de la Memoria (The House of Memories), which includes life-size video screens playing testimonies of those who lived through the violence – poignant reminders of just how far this intoxicating city has come.

Once the most dangerous area in the city, Comuna 13 has undergone a complete transformation in recent years



 **MEDELLÍN**

## Essential information

Most of Medellín's attractions can be reached via the city's Metro or cable car, so invest in a Metro card.

### Best time to visit

June to August (for the warmer weather) or December (to enjoy Christmas lights and festivities)

### Time zone

UTC-5

### Useful sites

[WWW.MEDELLIN.TRAVEL/EN](http://WWW.MEDELLIN.TRAVEL/EN)

[WWW.COLOMBIA.TRAVEL/EN/MEDELLIN](http://WWW.COLOMBIA.TRAVEL/EN/MEDELLIN)

[WWW.MUSEOCASADELAMEMORIA.GOV.CO/EN/](http://WWW.MUSEOCASADELAMEMORIA.GOV.CO/EN/)



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## MIAMI

### Essential information

Don't strip off or go topless on beaches unless it's a specifically designated stretch.

#### Best time to visit

*December to May (to avoid hurricane season)*

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

[WWW.MIAMIANDBEACHES.COM](http://WWW.MIAMIANDBEACHES.COM)

[WWW.VISITFLORIDA.COM/EN-US/CITIES/MIAMI](http://WWW.VISITFLORIDA.COM/EN-US/CITIES/MIAMI)

[WWW.MIAMIBEACHGUEST.COM](http://WWW.MIAMIBEACHGUEST.COM)



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Downtown Miami is home to many of the city's attractions, from parks to museums

© Getty/Art Wager

# MIAMI

## EXPLORE THE HIDDEN SIDE OF AMERICA'S BEACH AND PARTY CAPITAL

Sun, sea and sand in the shadow of skyscrapers – Miami is the ultimate urban beach resort. If you want to soak up the rays by day and enjoy a party at night, there is no better place to do so.

The barrier island of Miami Beach, particularly South Beach, is home to hundreds of hotels, bars and restaurants, but this is more than just a boozy fraternity and sorority hotspot. South Beach prides itself on its magnificent Art Deco architecture along Ocean Drive and its quirky, colourful lifeguard stands on the beach.

But here's the secret – Miami Beach is actually a distinct and separate city in its own right. Across the inviting azure waters of Biscayne Bay is the city of Miami itself, a thriving American metropolis with a generous serving of Latin flair. By all means enjoy the party capital of Miami Beach, but don't miss the highlights on the mainland.

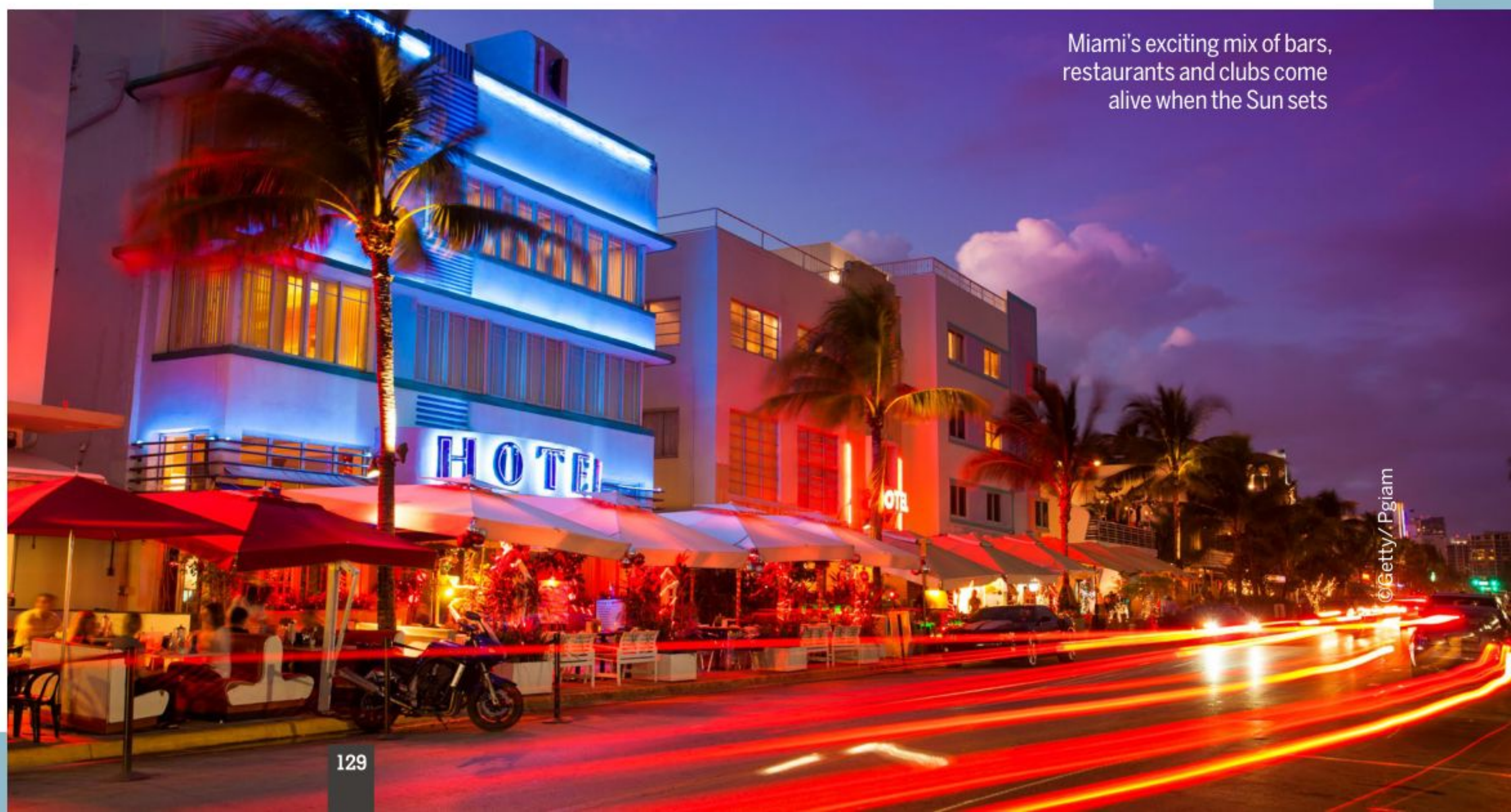
There is a beach here, too – Virginia Beach, which offers a chance to spot manatees in the water – but there are also fabulous tropical parks dotted across the city. Oleta River State Park has an abundance of colourful bird life to spot from walking trails or while paddling a canoe, and it's easy to lose a day in Fairchild Tropical Garden, just outside the city limits. The central district of Little Havana is probably where Miami's Cuban

heritage is at its greatest. Watch locals play cards and dominoes on fold-up tables in Máximo Gómez Park and take an edible journey down the best cafes on Calle Ocho with a food tour. The museums of Downtown Miami are worth a visit, particularly HistoryMiami, while the Design District and MiMo Boulevard, stuffed with Art Deco and post-war architecture, are undergoing significant regeneration as they recover from late-20th-century neglect.

Given the city's reputation as a party capital, the residents of Miami grasp any opportunity

for a celebration. Carnival Miami is a ten-day celebration of Miami's Latin roots, while Independence Day fireworks, the Ultra Music Festival and the oddly named King Mango Strut are fixtures on the calendar. Even when there is no other reason to have a good time, Miami's salsa halls, rooftop bars and open-front restaurants come alive by moonlight as well-dressed revellers bask in a neon glow.

Miami is well-named as the 'Magic City' – come for the beaches, and stay for the intoxicating blend of American and Latin culture.



Miami's exciting mix of bars, restaurants and clubs come alive when the Sun sets

© Getty/Pejam



Thousands of visitors flock to Valparaíso each year to wander the cobbled streets and take in the colourful scenery

## VALPARAÍSO

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### Essential information

Only wander well-lit alleys, where you can see the end.

#### Best time to visit

*March to April for shoulder-season weather and crowds*

#### Time zone

UTC-3

#### Useful sites

WWW.CHILE.TRAVEL  
WWW.THISISCHILE.CL  
WWW.MYVALPARAISO.CL



# VALPARAÍSO

THE COLONIAL MASTERPIECE, AND BOHEMIAN HIDEAWAY, THAT GLISTENS LIKE A RAINBOW ACROSS THE COAST AND OVER THE HILLS

Curving its way around the Chilean coast, the melting pot of Valparaíso conjures up its own unique brand of magnificence, overflowing with art and imagination. Long the muse of many an artist, poet and musician, the 'Jewel of the Pacific' is a dizzying labyrinth of muralled alleyways, colonial plazas and bohemian haunts.

The city's UNESCO-recognised historic quarter is a remarkable example of 19th-century Latin American architecture and urbanism. It wraps itself like an amphitheatre across the coast and hills, spewing out multicoloured houses and church spires. Once one of South America's most important seaport cities, since the opening of the Panama Canal, it has reinvented itself as a bastion of cultural diversity.

Climbing casually up the hills are the city's 16 iconic funiculars – ancient-looking boxes that serve as elevator-cum-cable cars, creeping up railway tracks. Characteristically colourful, the El Peral route unfolds over the cityscape, unveiling spectacular views, rolling all the way down to the Pacific coast – where surfers snap their wetsuits, ready for the next wave, and lovers lap up ice

creams, racing against the Sun. The city's oldest lift, Ascensor Concepción, delivers passengers to the graffiti-washed walls of Paseo Dimalow, dripping in wacky murals, and the Disneyesque green-roofed church of Luterana de la Santa Cruz. Alongside, there are boutique hotels and restaurants serving up ceviche, tickling menus with foreign flair, accompanied by some seriously creative cocktails.

Elsewhere, the cafes of Plaza Sotomayor offer a moment's pause. Overlooking the city's port, the Monumento a los Héroes de Iquique pays tribute to the Chilean sailors who died at the 1879 Battle of Iquique – sitting stoically alongside the baby blue colonial naval command centre, Edificio Armada de Chile.

Across the city, scores of boutique galleries and art collaboratives worm their way through alleyways and up the hills. Spaces like Espacio Rojo and Bahía Utópica showcase the best of Valparaíso's home-grown talents, highlighting the role their mutual muse, the city itself, plays in the creative process.

One of the most curious entries is the Palacio Baburizza, the Art Deco and Art Nouveau



ABOVE: Colour and creativity are part of the fabric of Valparaíso

former home of a Croatian resident, and now a school of Fine Arts. Meanwhile, perched atop La Sebastiana is the former home of the city's most beloved alumni, Pablo Neruda. Every New Year's Eve, he enjoyed watching South America's largest fireworks display from the comfort of his own home. Though there's much up-hill walking to be had, as Neruda once wrote, "If we walk up and down all the stairs of Valparaíso we'll have walked all round the world."



# MONTREAL

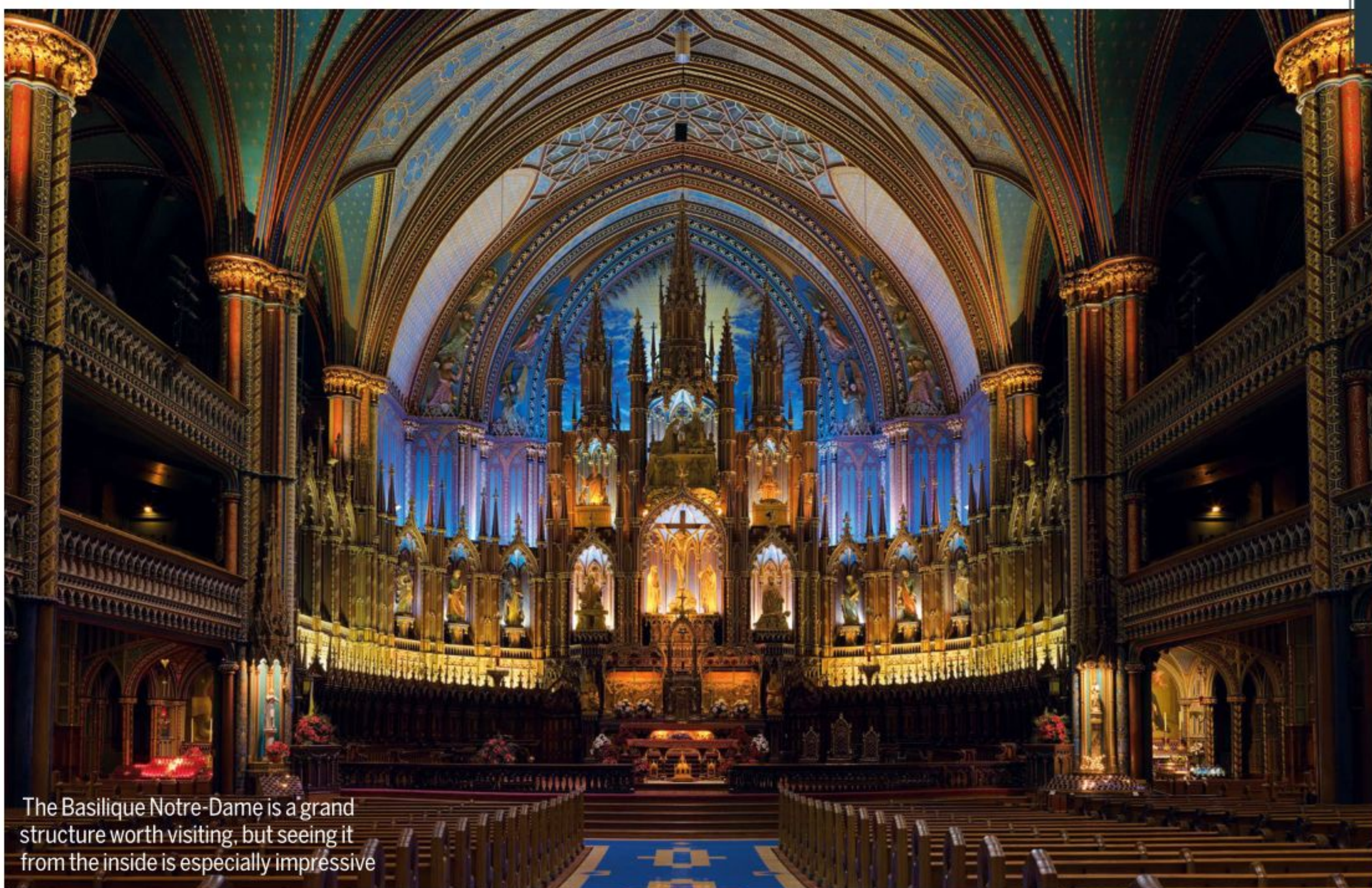
RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF THE NEARBY MOUNTAINS AND YOU'LL FIND PLENTY OF REASONS TO EXPLORE CANADA'S CULTURAL CAPITAL

It's hard to separate the snow from the mind's eye of Montreal, and for the near two million Québécois that live there, it's certainly become a crucial part of its lifestyle. In the summer, there's an excitement about the city, born from its many festivals, outdoor dining and heady afternoons in the lush greens of its downtown Mount Royal. Once the weather starts to turn, however, you'll see a new atmosphere surround the city, swapping in a more intimate and cosy feel as tourists and Montréalais alike take to the numerous bars, restaurants and quaint late-night eateries that fill its streets.

There's a reason for the city's status as the gastro capital of the country, too, drawing from its mixed French and English heritage and adding in a contemporary flair. You'll have your pick of places, as Montreal offers up Parisian patisseries, English pubs, Jewish delis, countless variations on Canada's national dish, poutine, and everything in between to gorge yourself on while exploring the city.

This mixed cultural history is a keystone for the city itself, which blends the quaintness of the 18th-century European Old Montreal with modern skyscrapers of its hip downtown arrondissement. As you tour the cobblestoned old town, you'll discover its many streets named after various saints, the reason for Montreal's colloquial name of the 'City of Saints'. But it's the ornate, Gothic architecture that will stand out the most, prime among them being the Basilique Notre-Dame, an elaborate and awe-inspiring historic structure. Its newer architecture is no less impressive, though, with the Olympic Stadium, the Great Library or inventive buildings like Habitat 67 among the numerous architectural sights.

It's perhaps no surprise to see so many eclectic buildings, though. Montreal has long



The Basilique Notre-Dame is a grand structure worth visiting, but seeing it from the inside is especially impressive

had a reputation as a haven for artists, designers and creatives across a wide spectrum of fields, and that has in turn given rise to a number of bohemian districts like Le Plateau or Mile End. Still, there's no ignoring that mountain that sits at the centre of the city, and Mount Royal is certainly iconic. In the warmer months, its sprawling nature, panoramic views of the city and St Joseph's Oratory will be more than enough to urge you up its slopes, but it's arguably in the snow when the mountain truly comes into its own. Tobogganing, snowshoeing and skiing are just some of the winter activities Mount Royal has to offer, and a day of such activities atop the heart of Montreal will no doubt make a seat beside the fireplace back down in one of the city's pubs all the more rewarding.



ABOVE: Montreal is one of those rare cities that manages to blend the new and the old with class

## MONTREAL

### Essential information

As a primarily French-speaking city, learning the key French pleasantries will go down a treat.

#### Best time to visit

summer (for the pleasant temperatures) or winter (if you can tolerate intense cold)

#### Time zone

UTC-5

#### Useful sites

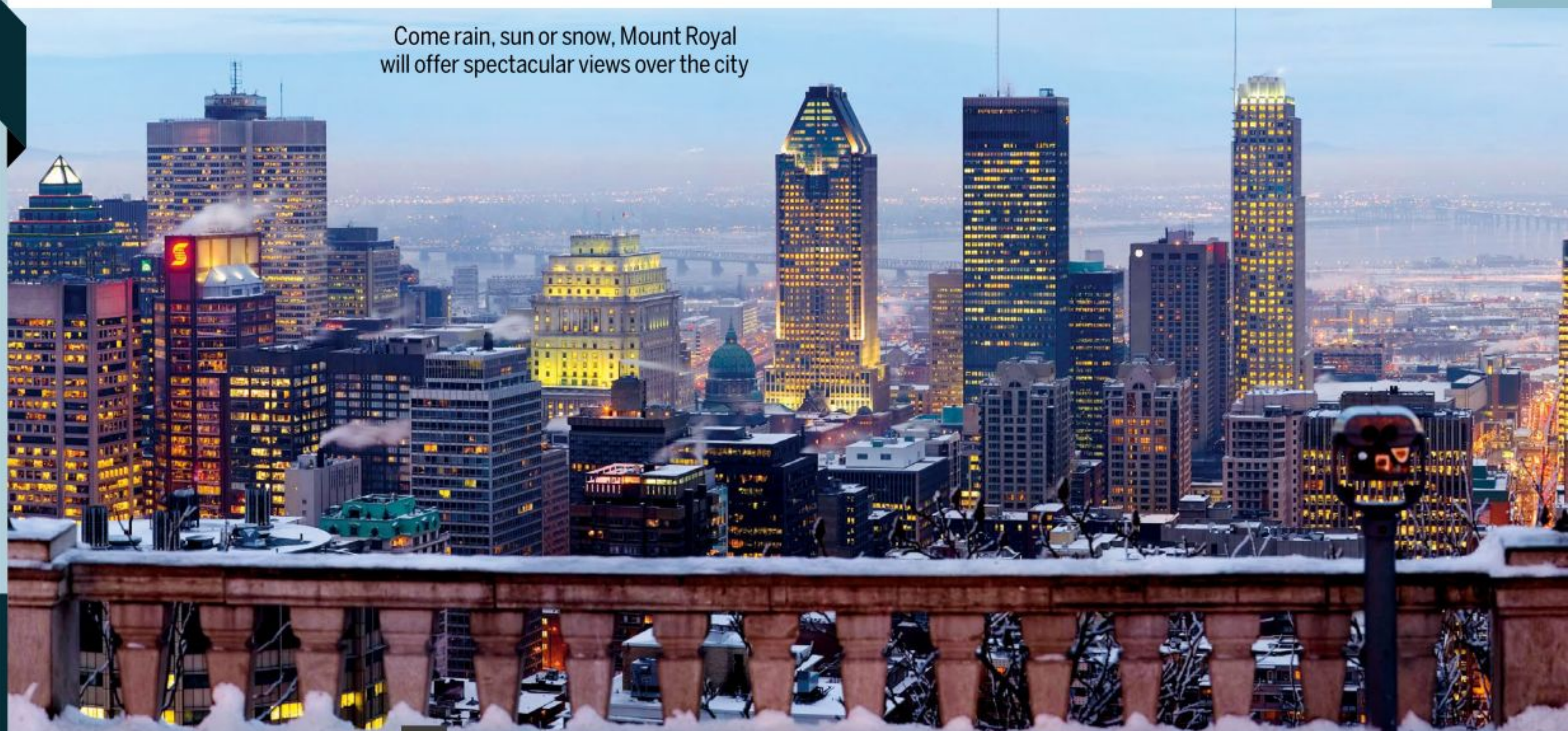
[WWW.MTL.ORG/EN](http://WWW.MTL.ORG/EN)

[WWW.GO-MONTREAL.COM](http://WWW.GO-MONTREAL.COM)

[WWW.MONTREALSOUTERRAIN.CA](http://WWW.MONTREALSOUTERRAIN.CA)



Come rain, sun or snow, Mount Royal will offer spectacular views over the city





On the skyline behind Portland sits the snow-capped Mount Hood

# PORTLAND

LOCATED ON TWO RIVERS, PORTLAND IS PACKED WITH CULTURE AND CHARACTER THAT WILL MAKE YOU INSTANTLY FALL IN LOVE

Portland's demographic has gradually become younger in recent years and has made way for a growing emphasis on an eco-friendlier and more sustainable lifestyle. Cycling is the best way to get around and is a great way to get your visit off to an active start.

Home to more than 75 breweries and pubs, you'll soon get a real taste of the best of what the city has to offer when it comes to liquid refreshment. Head out during happy hour for the best deals, and spend an evening on Alberta Street for the best selection of restaurants and bars in the city.

The city was actually named by the toss of a coin (it could have been named Boston) and the original copper penny can be seen today at the Oregon Historical Society Museum, situated in downtown Portland. Containing over 85,000 artefacts, take a few hours to peruse the displays and to learn about the city's interesting past.

The popular Washington Park, located in the city centre and covering over 400 acres of land, is where you can explore miles and miles of walking trails. This is home to Oregon Zoo, beautiful gardens and grand museums, and is also where you'll discover the Hoyt Arboretum,



Portland is well-known for its micro-breweries and many types of local brews

©Getty/ Grant Faint

open all year round and free to explore. The arboretum houses the International Rose Test Garden (the oldest in the US) and thousands of species of trees.

Catch a performance by Portland Center Stage at The Armory, a theatre company founded in 1988, to experience a taste of the theatrical side of the entertainment scene in Portland. In a similar vein, the Portland Opera presents a mix of modern and classic shows, so check the calendar before your visit to see the latest line-up. The city will keep on surprising, with Powell's City of Books, a giant bookstore occupying an entire city block. As the largest used and new bookstore in the world, Powell's is



**PORTLAND**

## Essential information

Visit during the summer months to witness the roses in full bloom.

### Best time to visit

June to August

### Time zone

UTC-8



### Useful sites

[WWW.TRAVELPORTLAND.COM](http://WWW.TRAVELPORTLAND.COM)

[WWW.VISITTHEUSA.CO.UK/DESTINATION/PORTLAND](http://WWW.VISITTHEUSA.CO.UK/DESTINATION/PORTLAND)

[WWW.PORTLANDOREGON.GOV](http://WWW.PORTLANDOREGON.GOV)

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a real landmark in the city. The store even runs free public tours every Sunday. For book lovers, this is a must-see.

Alternatively, book yourself onto a guided tour of the underground Shanghai Tunnels in Old Town and Chinatown to learn about a darker side to Portland. Or, get an insight into how Portland was the inspiration for *The Simpsons* with a half-day cycle tour, which includes a doughnut stop, of course!

**BELOW:** The many designated cycle routes allow you to easily get about the city



©Getty/ Thierry Levenq



# QUÉBEC CITY

UNCOVER THE HISTORY OF ONE OF NORTH AMERICA'S OLDEST CITIES IN THIS LIVING MUSEUM

Perhaps more than any other place in Canada, Québec City is by far and away the French hub of the country. While the nearby Montreal may share in the region's Franco heritage, Québec City has a distinctly French feeling to the place thanks in large part to its decidedly European look. It's perhaps not a surprise, though: at a third of the size of its metropolitan neighbour, the Canadian city is rather more removed from the need for an international lifestyle. You'll spot this first in the streets of Old Québec, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of 17th and 18th-century buildings that wouldn't look out of place in any major continental French city.

With that in mind, you'll likely want to start by heading towards Le Château Frontenac, the walled castle that dominates the view from practically any corner of the city below. In fact, it's almost ridiculous how picturesque the Old Town and port are – doubly true when they're draped in fresh snow. As you wander the cobbled and winding streets of Old Québec, you'll find yourself cast back to the fairy tales you were read as a child and wonder where you might find Prince Charming – or at least a Frog Prince – among the quaint boutique stores and

restaurants, which still hang wooden plaques as though the 18th century never ended. Eventually, you'll reach the funicular, which saves the hike to the top for around £2 (roughly \$2.50 USD). This 45-degree cogwheel railway trip is a must, allowing you to watch the rooftops of the Old Town grow smaller to earn you a different perspective of this idyllic city.

The history doesn't end there, however. Within the walls of the castle itself, you may be lucky to witness the Royal 22s and the changing of the guard. The colloquially named 'Van Doos' – from the French for 22, vingt-deux – are the pride of the city, a regiment that goes back to World War I. The citadel itself is home to two museums dedicated to this history of Québec City and the war between the English and the French. Be sure to check them out.

You wouldn't want to miss out on the natural wonders that surround the city, though. Day trips to national parks for kayaking, fishing or hiking are a must, key among them being Montmorency Falls, which is 30 metres (98 feet) higher than Niagara Falls. Like so many Canadian destinations, the outstanding natural setting only a stone's throw away makes this historic city a great place to return to.



©Getty/Vladone



©Getty/Steven\_Kriemadis

**TOP:** Montmorency Falls is a 20-minute drive out of Québec City and stands at 84m (276ft) tall

**ABOVE:** The walled city of Old Québec is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and has buildings dating back to the 17th century

Le Château Frontenac was built for an American military assault that never came, meaning its pristine and ornate appearance remains intact



## QUÉBEC CITY

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### Essential information

Old Québec is better suited to walking, but if you've had enough of that for a day then there's always a more romantic manner of transport – horse-drawn carriage.

### Best time to visit

June to August (for sun and festivals) or December to February (for the snow)

### Time zone

UTC-5

### Useful sites

[WWW.QUEBEC-CITE.COM/EN](http://WWW.QUEBEC-CITE.COM/EN)

[WWW.FEQ.CA/EN](http://WWW.FEQ.CA/EN)

[WWW.AVENTUREQUEBEC.CA/EN/QUEBEC](http://WWW.AVENTUREQUEBEC.CA/EN/QUEBEC)



©Getty/rabbit75\_list



With its legendary jazz scene, you'll find music round every corner in New Orleans



## NEW ORLEANS

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### Essential information

Be aware that public transport is very limited during Mardi Gras.

### Best time to visit

*February to March to enjoy Mardi Gras*

### Time zone

UTC-6



### Useful sites

[WWW.NEWORLEANS.COM](http://WWW.NEWORLEANS.COM)

[WWW.MARDIGRASNEWORLEANS.COM](http://WWW.MARDIGRASNEWORLEANS.COM)

[WWW.LOUISIANATRAVEL.COM/CITIES/NEW-ORLEANS](http://WWW.LOUISIANATRAVEL.COM/CITIES/NEW-ORLEANS)

©Getty/Photoservice

# NEW ORLEANS

## IT'S EASY TO HAVE AN INCREDIBLE TIME IN THE CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE BIG EASY

Located at the deepest part of the USA's Deep South, New Orleans in Louisiana is a hotbed of thrilling and unique food, culture, experiences and, of course, legendary carnivals.

We'll start with the reason many people head to New Orleans – Mardi Gras. The festival's

origins can be traced as far back as medieval Europe, but it found its spiritual home in New Orleans in the 1730s. Mardi Gras, which means 'Fat Tuesday' and is the final day before Lent fasting begins, grew and grew over the decades to morph into the internationally renowned event

it is today. People flock from all round the world to enjoy the festivities, so if you plan to visit, then book well in advance and be prepared to pay a little over the odds. New Orleans accommodation is mostly B&B-based, with a few hotels and wide availability of Airbnb properties.

Mardi Gras takes place 47 days before Easter, but the celebrations take place for roughly a month before that date, building to a crescendo in the weekend before Fat Tuesday itself. Parades snake their way through the city every evening and the sight is utterly astonishing, with dozens of spectacularly decorated floats, each with their own unique theme, followed by rows upon rows of high school marching bands. The sounds, the sights, the energy of the crowds and the performers are a true sight to behold and the atmosphere is unbelievable.

Try to get there early to get at the front of the crowd to get the best view and the best beads. Oh yes, the beads. A Mardi Gras tradition is to hurl brightly coloured bead necklaces out into the crowd who grab, gather and proudly wear their spoils for the rest of the day. You need to keep your wits about you as a flying necklace can catch you quite a whack. You'll also need



©Getty/peeterv

New Orleans knows how to party and its nightlife is not one to miss



## "PARADES SNAKE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE CITY EVERY EVENING"

The French Quarter is the oldest, and arguably most picturesque, neighbourhood in New Orleans



to keep looking skyward as you take a stroll down Bourbon Street. This road is lined with bars, restaurants and shops, but above them are flats with balconies that the residents stand on, hurling out hundreds of further beads to revellers

below. Once again, the atmosphere is energetic and electric as hordes of partygoers inch their way down the street, arms aloft for treasures, occasionally popping into a bar for a slushy cocktail or some freeform jazz that keep the fun going long into the night.

However, don't spend too long partying because there is much to explore in this historic city. The French Quarter is the city's most luxurious area with gorgeous colonial-style houses set back from the tree-lined streets. This area is well worth a stroll around to drink in the opulent side of the city. Buses are regular and cheap, if you pick up a Jazzy Pass, which allows you unlimited journeys on buses and streetcars around the city, including the one that flanks a famous New Orleans neighbour.

New Orleans is situated on the banks of the Mississippi River, this mighty waterway's last port of call before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico, and the river provides many unique diversions for the curious traveller. Steamboat cruises set off from the east of the city, lazily chugging their way down the world's fourth-largest river. Some way out of the city, the banks are lined with historic sugar plantations. There are dozens to explore and tour, where you can learn the history of the plantations and their importance to the wealth of the city as well as hear the stories of the slaves that worked on the land.

To the northeast of the city are the swamps of Louisiana, where you can take an airboat swamp



## NEW ORLEANS FOOD

New Orleans' history as a place with a wide variety of immigrants from wildly different backgrounds has lent itself to a wide, rich tradition of delicious and varied food.

Po'boys are French loaves stuffed full of fried shrimp or beef, ideal for a hearty lunch. Options for dinner include jambalaya, a smoked meat, seafood and rice dish; gumbo, a thick seafood stew; or fried chicken and waffles. And if you still have room for dessert, you have to try a box of baignets, choux pastry dusted with icing sugar; or King Cake, a messy iced cinnamon cake. All of these dishes originate from or around New Orleans, with the heavy seafood element due to its proximity to the sea. The heady mix of Americans, French and African slaves means that the food available in this multicultural city is unlike any combination you will get anywhere else in the world.

Riding an iconic streetcar provides an authentic way to take in the city



tour and spot alligators, bald eagles and swamp snakes. It truly is an original and thrilling way to take in some of the most fascinating scenery in the state.

Back on land, there are plenty more sights to see. New Orleans City Park is a gorgeous green space with groves of ancient oak trees and Louisiana cypress trees, a stunning botanical garden and the New Orleans Museum of Art. The centre of the city plays host to the Voodoo Museum – a nod to the city's spiritual religion, which banishes a number of the preconceptions many people have about voodoo. If you're still after more intriguing history, Jackson Square is a lovely tranquil patch, overlooked by the beautiful St Louis Cathedral – a triple-steepled Catholic church that has stood on the site since the late 18th century.

New Orleans is a truly remarkable city. At all times of day or night this welcoming city is buzzing with the sounds of jazz, the smells of the city's delicious food, the sights of the gardens, museums, plantations and riverside. New Orleans may be best known as the home of Mardi Gras, but the annual festival is just a small part of what makes 'The Big Easy' one of the easiest places to have a good time.









# Australasia

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**99 Cairns**  
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# SYDNEY

NO TRIP DOWN UNDER IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A VISIT TO AUSTRALIA'S MULTICULTURAL METROPOLIS

Why settle for having to choose between a city break and a beach holiday when you can enjoy both? Sydney's bustling centre offers a diverse variety of cultural attractions, with a choice of stunning golden beaches just a stone's throw away. It's not difficult to see why more than ten million tourists visit Australia's largest city every year.

One of the best ways to get acquainted with Sydney is to take a walking tour. The I'm Free Walking Tours are led by local guides (easily spotted in their bright-green shirts) who explain the stories behind the city's major sights, and can give you plenty of tips on where to visit, eat and drink during your stay. Although the tours are free, be sure to tip your guide at the end.

Think of Sydney, and the eponymous Opera House immediately springs to mind. Join one of the daily tours to learn more about this unique building's history, or go behind the scenes with a backstage tour to explore parts of the Sydney Opera House that aren't otherwise open to the public. For an unforgettable evening, you could book to watch one of the many performances that take to the Sydney Opera House stage each year. Don't worry if opera's not your cup of tea – there are all kinds of performances to enjoy, including music, theatre, dance, comedy, circus, cabaret and many more. When planning your trip, be sure to check out the upcoming schedule.

Sydney has plenty of other cultural hotspots to visit. The city's galleries display works of the Old Masters as well as modern, contemporary and indigenous art. Admire the marvellous architecture of the Queen Victoria Building;

originally constructed in the 1890s but restored in the 1980s, today it is home to some of Sydney's finest boutiques. Museums across the city host fascinating exhibits where you can learn more about Sydney's history, the natural world, science and technology, and more. In particular, the Australian Museum is the country's oldest, specialising in natural history and anthropology. Its dinosaur exhibition is a guaranteed hit with visitors of all ages.

The city also has a fantastic foodie scene, with a wide variety of restaurants, bars and cafés. Sydney's multicultural character is reflected in its food, and you'll find flavour influences and fusion cuisine from all over the world. Whether you want a quick bite or a three-course gourmet meal, there will be plenty of choice, no matter what your tastes or budget.

As with many major tourist hubs, Sydney's hop-on hop-off bus tour is a convenient way to see all the city's main sights for a reasonable price. A ticket will give you access to two routes: one that circulates the city and another that heads out to Bondi Beach. Both tours include optional pre-recorded audio guides that you can tune into to learn more about the sights you're passing. 24- and 48-hour tickets are available and, depending on how many of the tours' locations you're keen to see, they may save you having to pay for taxis or other public transport during your stay.

Being a harbour city, another great way to explore Sydney is from the water. Take an exhilarating jet-boat ride, paddle around the waterfront in a kayak, or enjoy a luxury cruise.

**"SYDNEY OFFERS A DIVERSE VARIETY OF CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS"**

Enjoy the golden sands and crystal-clear waters of Sydney's many beaches



©Getty/ Alfred Muljadi / EyeEm

Many popular destinations around Sydney and its suburbs can be reached by ferry from Circular Quay. Head to Darling Harbour for some retail therapy, or hop on a boat to Taronga Zoo and visit more than 4,000 native and exotic animals.

To soak up some of Sydney's reliable sunshine, many of its beautiful beaches are easy to reach by ferry. One of the most popular spots for sunbathing, surfing and snorkelling is Manly. Learn to ride the waves with lessons at Manly Surf School, or hire a snorkel at the Cabbage Tree Bay Aquatic Reserve for some up-close encounters with the local marine wildlife.

You can also get a ferry to Watsons Bay, where Camp Cove offers a little more peace and quiet than the more popular beaches. From here you can embark on a picturesque walk along the South Head Heritage Trail up to the candy-striped Hornby Lighthouse, where you can admire Sydney Harbour to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. If you're lucky, you may even be able to spot migrating whales between June and September.

By far the most famous stretch of sand in Sydney, if not all of Australia, is Bondi Beach. It's a popular spot in summer, particularly in the areas close to the bus stops, so head to the northern end of the beach to enjoy a little more space. Campbell Parade has plenty of cafés and restaurants overlooking Bondi where you can get refreshments and watch the world go by.

While staying in Sydney, make sure you take time to venture out of the city to visit the Blue Mountains, a World Heritage Area about two hours away. The region gets its name from the distinctive azure haze that envelops the mountains and forests here, making for some spectacular scenery. There are many clifftop vantage points and walking paths to explore, and

Head out of the city to discover the stunning natural beauty of the Blue Mountains



©Getty/zetter



 **SYDNEY**
**Essential information**

Book in advance to see a show at the Opera House or perform a BridgeClimb.

**Best time to visit**

*September to November  
(for warm weather but  
fewer crowds)*

**Time zone**

UTC+10/+11

**Useful sites**

[SYDNEY.COM](http://SYDNEY.COM)

[SYDNEYEXPERT.COM](http://SYDNEYEXPERT.COM)

[CITYOFSYDNEY.NSW.GOV.AU](http://CITYOFSYDNEY.NSW.GOV.AU)



You'll fall in love with Sydney's laid-back atmosphere and vibrant culture

even a glass-bottomed cable car that travels across the valley. For adrenaline junkies there are plenty of more adventurous activities to enjoy in the area, including rock climbing, mountain biking and skydiving. There's even white water rafting, canoeing and kayaking on offer at Penrith Whitewater Stadium (the course built for the 2000 Sydney Olympics), located at the foot of the mountains.

Sydney's position on the southeast coast mostly protects it from the extreme heat and tropical storms that affect other parts

of Australia. Winters are typically mild and summers are reliably warm to hot, so it's a great year-round destination.

Don't forget to consider special events when planning your trip too – the Sydney Festival is held every January, and the stunning Vivid Sydney festival of light, music and ideas takes place in May and June each year. Of course, the city's New Year's Eve celebrations are among the best in the world, but be sure to book your activities and accommodation well in advance for that.

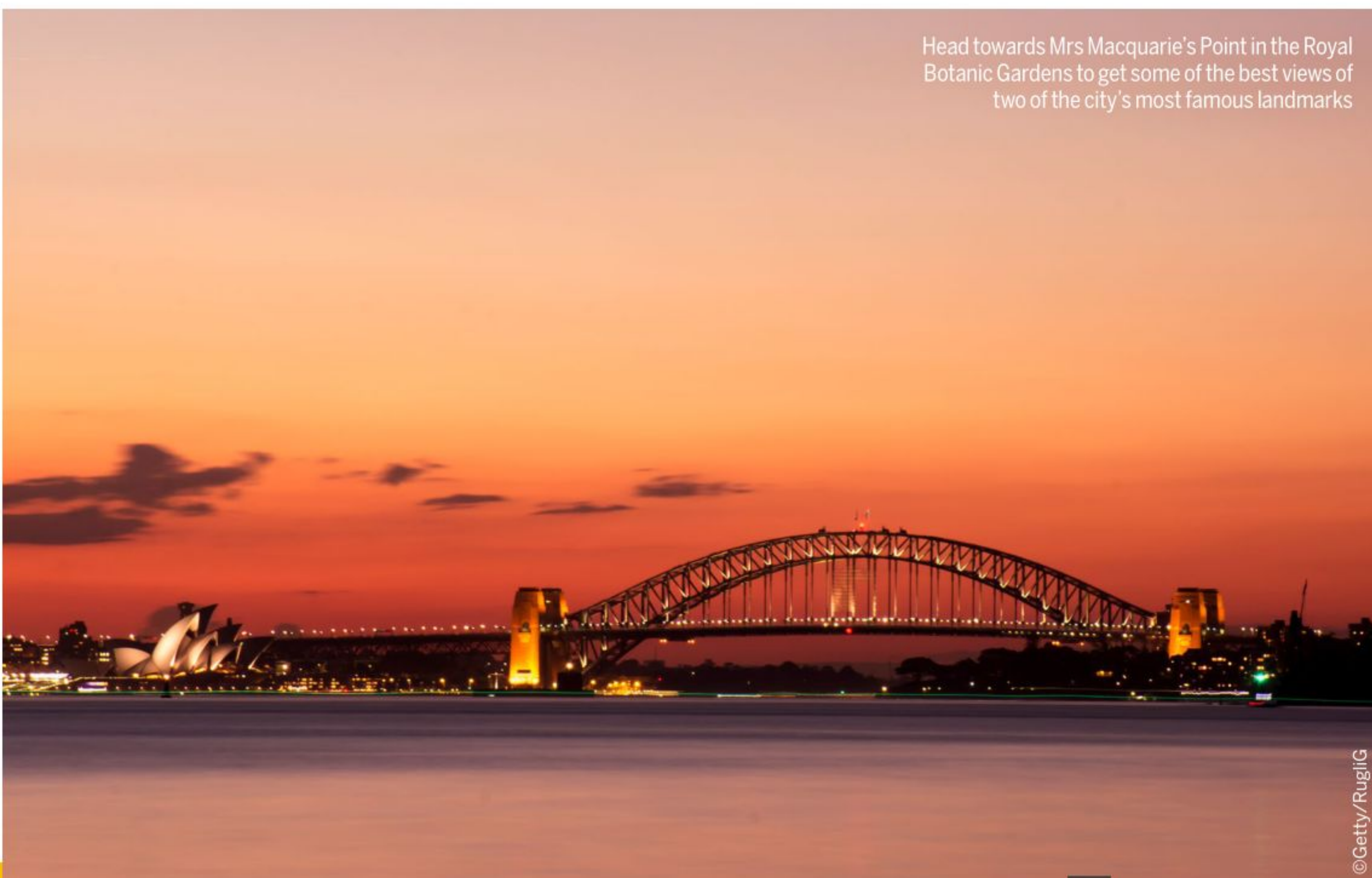
Head towards Mrs Macquarie's Point in the Royal Botanic Gardens to get some of the best views of two of the city's most famous landmarks

**BRIDGE CLIMB SYDNEY**

For a unique and unforgettable experience, why not scale the Sydney Harbour Bridge? BridgeClimb Sydney offers guided climbs across the steel arches up to a vantage point at the summit, where you can enjoy unrivalled panoramic views of the harbour. During the climb, your guide will tell you all about the bridge's fascinating history and take souvenir photos for you.

As well as the standard BridgeClimb, the company also offers an Express option – which takes a different route for a faster tour – and a Sampler option that goes halfway up via the inner arch, ideal for those who may be unsure of heights.

You can also book tours specifically for dawn, twilight and at night to see the bridge and the city in a totally different light. To make the climb extra special, BridgeClimb will even help you organise birthday parties, proposals or weddings at the summit. For more information visit [bridgeclimb.com](http://bridgeclimb.com).



©Getty/shan.shihan

Downtown Sydney is a bustling urban and business centre



©Getty/RugliG



Wellington is not only New Zealand's political capital, but its cultural and culinary capital too


**WELLINGTON**
**98**

## Essential information

Introduce yourself to the city with a walking tour.

### Best time to visit

*March to May (for pleasant weather and thin crowds)*

### Time zone

UTC+13

### Useful sites

[WWW.WALKWELLINGTON.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.WALKWELLINGTON.ORG.NZ)

[WWW.NEWZEALAND.COM](http://WWW.NEWZEALAND.COM)

[WWW.TEPAPA.GOV.T.NZ](http://WWW.TEPAPA.GOV.T.NZ)



# WELLINGTON

**NEW ZEALAND'S CAPITAL OF GOVERNMENT, CULTURE AND FOOD IS A CITY THAT WEARS MANY HATS**

Set at the stunning southern tip of New Zealand's North Island, overlooking the Cook Strait, is the country's remarkable capital, Wellington. In the distance, a lone kayak silently straddles the waterfront of Oriental Bay, where children hurl themselves down slides and couples share ice cream. Stretching outwards from its idyllic harbour and strips of beach, the city's pretty houses intersperse themselves over the mountain, dressed in a thick layer of foliage.

While many capital cities can be dismissed as boring centres of governance, the world's southernmost capital is something else entirely; the country's capital of culture and cuisine.

Perpendicular to the harbour is Cuba Street, an eclectic hub of all things indie. From the Snickers shakes at Fidel's to the Satay Kingdom's steaming roti curries, and the esoteric books of Pegasus to the obscure gems of Slow Boat Records, it's all well outside the box.

Art is clearly central to the city, with poignant street art and galleries at every turn. While the powerhouse, City Gallery, curates an overwhelming selection of exhibitions sure to boggle and inspire, Pataka highlights some of the most fascinating Maori, Pacific Island and Kiwi artists around.

The creativity does not stop there. Jutting out of the Miramar Peninsula is Weta Cave, home to Weta Studios, where film buffs immerse themselves in the stories behind the blockbusters, such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Avatar*. Guests can enjoy a tour of the props, creatures and vehicles that went into making the films that put New Zealand on the movie map.

Chief among them all is Te Papa, the country's national museum, an ever-evolving tribute to its art, science, culture and heritage. Te Papa aims to immerse visitors in the cultures, communities and landscapes that have shaped the country.

Another trip down memory lane travels from Lambton Quay up towards the picturesque suburb of Kelburn, via the historic red cable car. From its peak, city, harbour and mountain blur into one magnificent view, while the Botanic Gardens make for a stunning walk back down.

For something a little further afield, the Zealandia sanctuary offers nature lovers a truly wonderful glimpse into some of the country's rarest creatures. Over the next 500 years, the conservation project aims to restore the region's forest and freshwater ecosystems to their pre-human state. Whether enjoyed by day or by night, there is a wonderful array of endemic birds and plants, rare reptiles and virtually prehistoric insects for you to meet.

## "ART IS CENTRAL TO THE CITY, WITH STREET ART AND GALLERIES AT EVERY TURN"

Take the historic red cable car up to the suburb of Kelburn for stunning views of the city



©Getty / Martin Vlnas



# CAIRNS

THE CITY WHERE THE WORLD'S GREATEST CORAL REEF MEETS ITS OLDEST RAINFOREST

Cairns is a gateway to wonder itself. Set on the northeastern coast of Queensland, the city of 160,000 is nestled between rainforest and ocean, the only place in the world blanketed between two world heritage areas.

As the hilltop rainforest dissolves into white sand, beyond the spectacular coloured windows of St Monica's Cathedral, the twinkle of fairy lights illuminates the beach, where shacks dish up fresh barramundi and calamari. This sleepy shoreline is the springboard to one of the world's most magnificent miracles of nature, the Great Barrier Reef – the only living structure visible from space. However, whether hopping aboard a ship at Cairns, or Port Douglas, a one-hour-drive north, the view is more spectacular from earth.

One of the best places to soak up the wonder in all her majesty is Hart Reef, a magnificent heart-shaped system. Seaplanes and helicopters soar overhead, as colourful clusters of coral frame the translucent turquoise sea surrounding the Whitsunday Islands. Many trips stop at the 6.5-kilometre (four-mile) long Whitehaven Beach, a stunning stretch of icing-sugar sand, massaged across the oceanscape. Further south, 28 metres (92 feet) below the ocean lies a 110-metre (360-foot) hunk of rusting metal, the SS Yongala. One of the most renowned scuba-diving spots on the planet, it's a diver's dream, home to manta rays, sharks, turtles, tropical fish and even sea snakes.

At Cape Tribulation, just north of Cairns, the reef embraces the Daintree Rainforest. The oldest rainforest on Earth, it sprawls 1,200 square kilometres (460 square miles), spilling over the coastline and into the Great Divide. Boasting a tropical rainforest the size of Sydney, Daintree is home to a number of rare plants and animals.

Beneath its canopy, adventurers walk among the mountains, carpeted in ancient foliage, draped over some of Australia's most remarkable critters – tree-dwelling kangaroos and cassowaries. Small boats weave cautiously between the Daintree River's saltwater crocodiles, up close and personal with a third of Australia's frog, reptile and marsupial species. Meanwhile, the Aerial Walkway stretches into the treetops, alongside two thirds of the country's bat and butterfly species and a fifth of its bird breeds – all kept well-fed by 12,000 types of insect.

Higher still, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway traverses the mountainside, unravelling the mysteries of indigenous culture at Tjapukai Aboriginal Park, and meeting the Kuranda Scenic Railway. Throttling two hours around forest and waterfalls, the train arrives at the eccentric village of Kuranda, where heritage and hippie markets share space with culture and wildlife museums, and cool cafes.



Cairns is the perfect city for both thrill seekers and those looking for a bit of R & R

©Getty/John Crux Photography



## CAIRNS

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### Essential information

Be sure to take plenty of sunscreen and mosquito repellent.

### Best time to visit

*April to September (for warm, dry weather and shoulder-season crowds and pricing)*

### Time zone

UTC+10

### Useful sites

[WWW.SKYRAIL.COM.AU](http://WWW.SKYRAIL.COM.AU)  
[WWW.DISCOVERTHEDAINTREE.COM](http://WWW.DISCOVERTHEDAINTREE.COM)  
[WWW.VISITCAIRNS.COM.AU](http://WWW.VISITCAIRNS.COM.AU)



Explore the nearby rainforest and discover some of the region's incredible wildlife



©Getty/Leon Datoite Fernandez/EyeEm



Hire a car to venture further outside of the city and to the many beaches



**AUCKLAND**

## Essential information

Book early onto a whale watching tour to secure a place.

### Best time to visit

*November to April*

### Time zone

UTC+13

### Useful sites

[WWW.AUCKLANDNZ.COM](http://WWW.AUCKLANDNZ.COM)

[WWW.NEWZEALAND.COM/UK/AUCKLAND](http://WWW.NEWZEALAND.COM/UK/AUCKLAND)

[WWW.EXPERIENCEOZ.COM.AU/EN/AUCKLAND](http://WWW.EXPERIENCEOZ.COM.AU/EN/AUCKLAND)



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©Getty/Mark Meredith

# AUCKLAND

**ENJOY YOUR NEW ZEALAND ADVENTURE IN THE COUNTRY'S CULTURAL HUB, WHERE THERE'S NEVER A DULL MOMENT**

Home to more than 1.7 million people (that's a third of the country's total population) Auckland is New Zealand's busiest city. Situated between two harbours and surrounded by an incredible natural environment, Auckland is just as much about urban experiences as it is about outdoor exploration. This is a city for food and wine lovers, and with seafood being the speciality, there's plenty of culinary experiences to enjoy.

Don't miss the chance to rise to 220 metres (721 feet) above the city by going up the Sky Tower to capture Auckland in panoramic splendour. From the top, photograph the array of superyachts dotted along the Viaduct Harbour and, for those looking for the ultimate adrenaline rush, free fall for 11 seconds with a SkyJump ticket, costing £113 (\$225NZD). A day trip to the iconic volcanic island of Rangitoto, with short ferry rides from Downtown Auckland across the harbour, is a must. The island is the ideal location

for hikers to break into new boots and explore, or alternatively tag along on a guided tour on the road train to reach the summit and enjoy its spectacular views. There's also the option to paddle out on a kayak to catch the sunset for a more romantic experience.

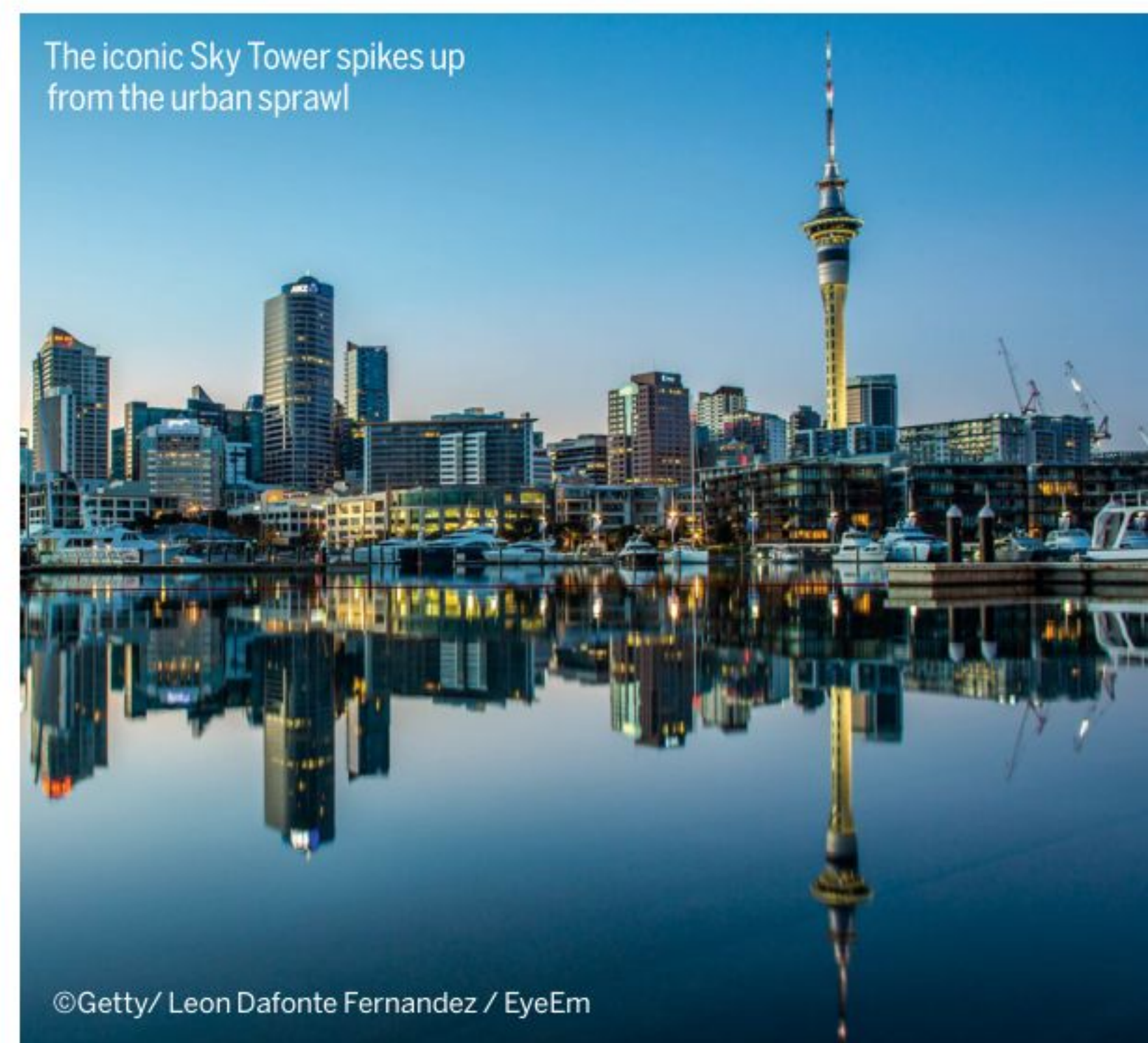
Auckland's Mount Eden is a dormant volcano lying completely under grass, and takes the title as the city's highest natural point. The Auckland Domain is the city's oldest park, and is home to the Domain Wintergardens, which are made up of two large greenhouses.

Venture into the Downtown district to experience the best the city has to offer in terms of cafes, restaurants and bars, and take a few hours out of your day to pay a visit to the Auckland War Memorial to absorb some of its historical past.

For animal lovers, Auckland Zoo and Auckland Whale & Dolphin Safari provide entertainment for all ages, and if all that gets too much to

handle, then kick back on one of the many sandy beaches on the city's outskirts to escape from urban life. Renting a car will mean you can travel further afield to get the most out of your stay. The Waitakere Ranges Regional Park is just 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) outside the city, and this is where you can take on the many walking trails passing by beautiful waterfalls and incredible coastal routes.

The iconic Sky Tower spikes up from the urban sprawl



©Getty/ Leon Dafonte Fernandez / EyeEm

**"A DAY TRIP TO THE ICONIC VOLCANIC ISLAND OF RANGITOTO IS A MUST"**



# MELBOURNE

THIS MELTING POT OF OLD AND MODERN IS A JEWEL IN AUSTRALIA'S CROWN

If you're after a beautiful city with plenty to do, Melbourne is just what you're looking for. Picturesque streets mingle with urban architecture to create a vibrant fusion that's just waiting to be explored.

Hosier Lane is a good place to start. Located near Melbourne Town Hall, its walls are home to the street art that has made Melbourne's urban art scene world famous. Colours and characters adorn the buildings here, and there are even guided tours providing background on the artists who come from all around the globe. Many finish their time here with a cocktail at Bar Tini or some tapas at Movida. If you haven't had your fill of art, there are numerous galleries in the city, but you can also head to Docklands to view some of the contemporary sculptures on the waterfront.

There is plenty to do in Docklands besides art, though. You could take a ride on the Melbourne Star, the city's answer to the London Eye, and get the entire panoramic view of the city. You can also go ice skating year-round, or have a

game of crazy golf with neon lights and glow-in-the-dark technology.

Perhaps you'd like to spend a day of your trip delving into Australia's rich history? Melbourne's got you covered. Spend a spell at the Old Melbourne Gaol, the last place where notorious bushranger Ned Kelly walked alive. If you'd rather not go to prison, a stroll along St Kilda Pier, built in 1853, is probably more for you. From there you can catch a ferry to Williamstown, a Melbourne suburb, or see if you can spot any penguins.

Australia is, of course, known for its animals, and you can see plenty at Zoos Victoria without having to brave the bush. In the city itself is Melbourne Zoo, with your typical zoo exhibits as well as animals from the Aussie outback like koalas, Tasmanian devils, wombats, kangaroos, emus, cockatoos and more. Just an hour away in Healesville you'll also find Healesville Sanctuary, where you could even spot the elusive platypus.

Back in the city, why not take a walk through the peaceful Royal Botanic Gardens or spend



ABOVE: Melbourne Docklands is a vibrant area waiting to be uncovered

your day in Chinatown. Alternatively, you can head to Luna Park for a day of family fun with fairground rides, a mirror maze and much more. This has only just scratched the surface of the amount there is to do in Melbourne – there's so much more to uncover.

Central Melbourne offers the perfect blend of old and modern architecture and is famed for its alleyways and shopping arcades

©Getty/zetter



**MELBOURNE**

## Essential information

Melbourne's tram network is the largest in the world – make sure you use it to its full advantage!

### Best time to visit

*November to April*

### Time zone

UTC+10/+11

### Useful sites

[WWW.VISITMELBOURNE.COM](http://WWW.VISITMELBOURNE.COM)

[WWW.MELBOURNE.VIC.GOV.AU](http://WWW.MELBOURNE.VIC.GOV.AU)

[WWW.MELBOURNEAUSTRALIA.ORG](http://WWW.MELBOURNEAUSTRALIA.ORG)



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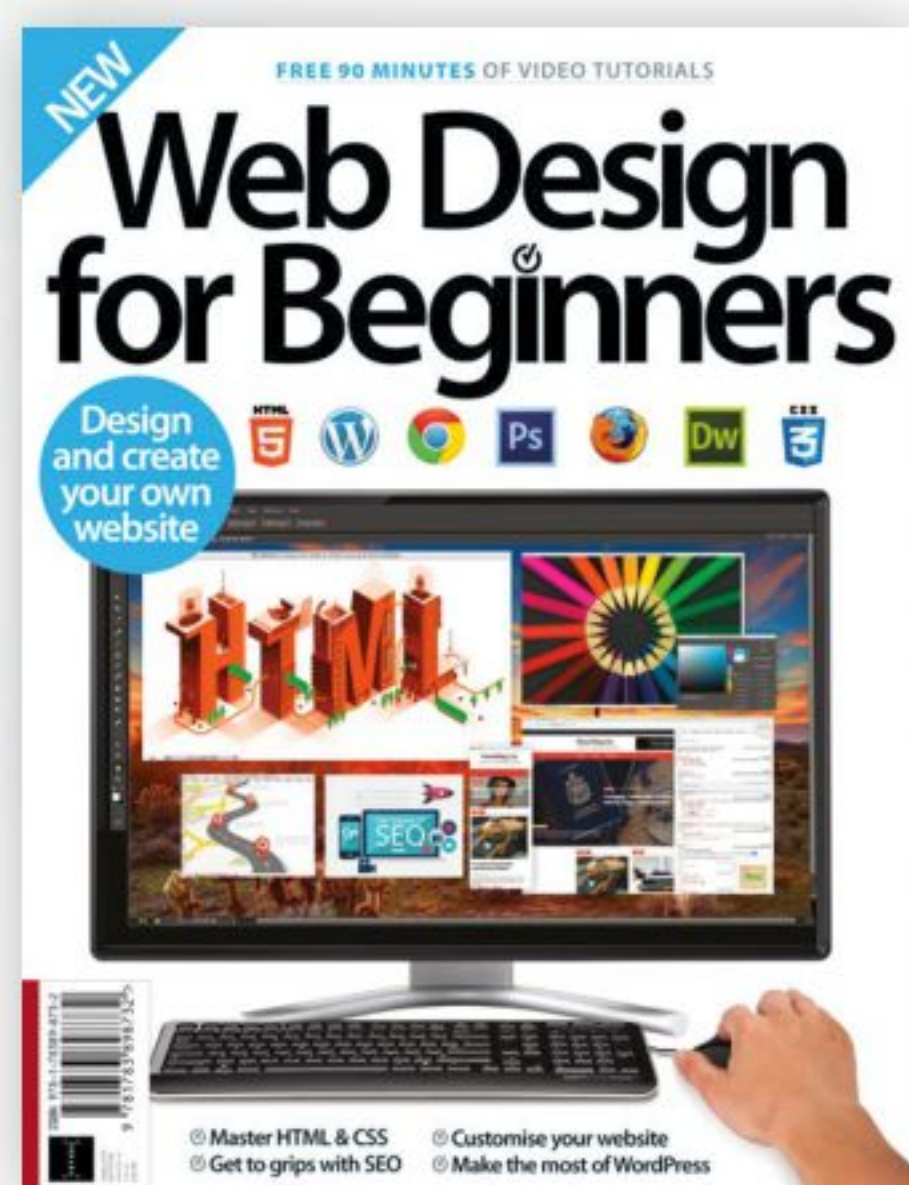
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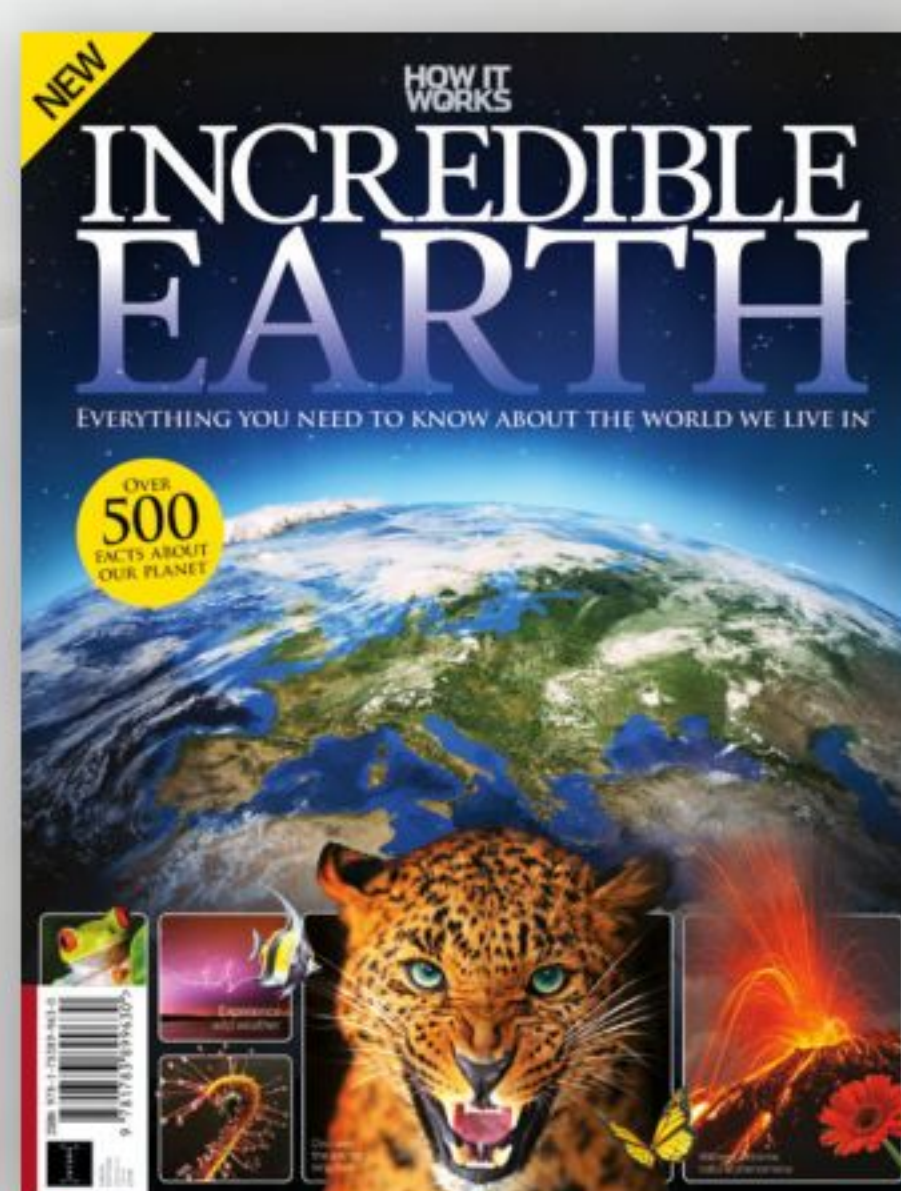
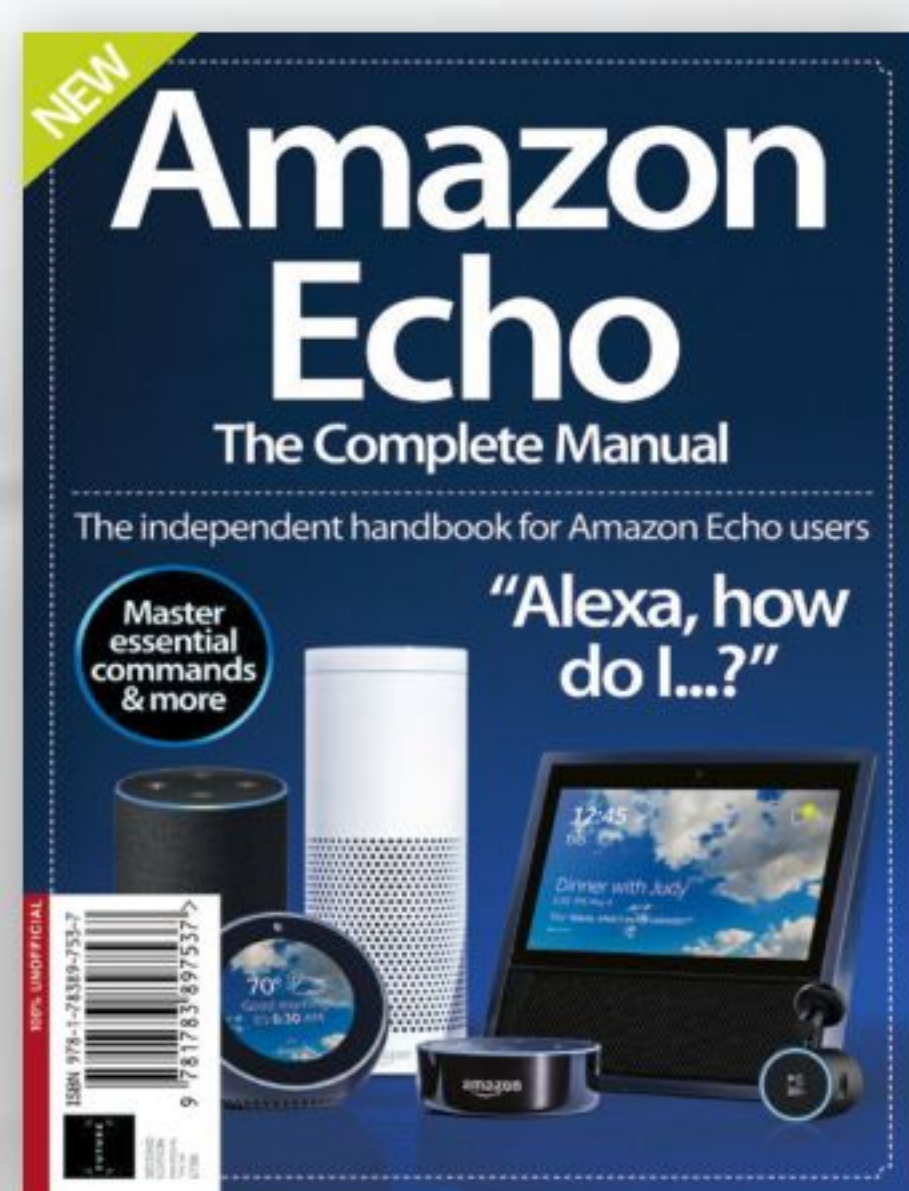
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